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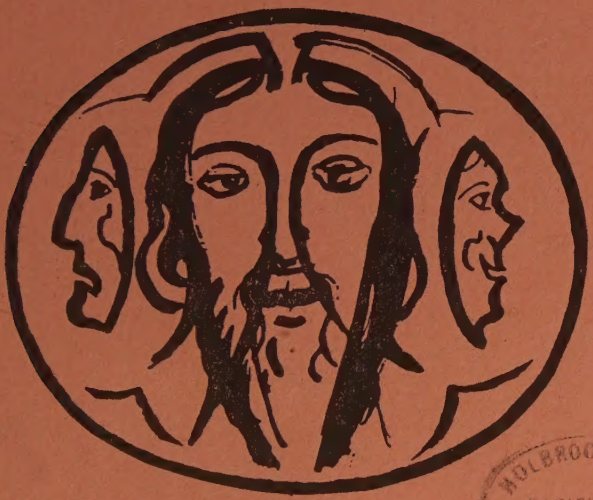
CHRISTIAN DRAMA



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CHRISTIAN DRAMA

edited by
JOHN HESTER

cover designed by JOHN PIPER

Contents

	Page
EDITORIAL	3
A PERSONAL VIEW, *by Donald Swann*	4
THE CHARACTER OF RELIGIOUS DRAMA, *by David William*	6
RELIGIOUS DRAMA IN THE PROVINCE OF YORK	18
LONDON THEATRE, *by Frances Glendenning*	20
BIRTH BY DROWNING, *a new play by Norman Nicholson*	26
MANY HAPPY RETURNS TO THE CHRISTIAN DRAMA COUNCIL OF CANADA	29
IN MEMORIAM: MISS CREAGH HENRY	29
THE PATRONAGE AND PRACTICE OF THE ARTS, *by Doreen Woodcock*	30
RESULT OF PLAY COMPETITION	31
IMPORTANT CHANGES IN R.D.S. REGULATIONS	32
OBERAMMERGAU TOURS 1960	33
ADDITIONS TO THE LIBRARY	34
1959 ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING	37
FAR AND WIDE	38

All opinions expressed in these pages are personal, and are not necessarily those of the Religious Drama Society of Great Britain

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MICHAEL FLANDERS AND DONALD SWANN, WHO ARE NOW PLAYING IN NEW YORK IN THEIR TWO-MAN SHOW *AT THE DROP OF A HAT*. DONALD SWANN WRITES IN THIS NUMBER OF *CHRISTIAN DRAMA*

(*Photo by Angus McBean*)

EDITORIAL

The printing strike happened at precisely the time when the Summer number of *Christian Drama* should have been produced: we sincerely regret that it had finally to be abandoned. One result is that a number of the reviews published this time have even longer whiskers than usual, and we apologize to all who may have been affected by this delay.

I would commend to your special attention the decisions of the Upper House of the York Convocation reprinted later in this issue. Their Lordships have spoken with wisdom on several controversial matters concerning religious drama, and one hopes that their decisions will be profitably followed elsewhere as well as in the Province of York.

I was privileged to serve as one of the chaplains at this year's Summer School, and it was a rich experience for me. The standard of work was very high and a deep seriousness underpinned all the gaiety and fellowship. But I think that I was most impressed by the quality of the tutors and by the respect with which they were treated by everyone concerned. It was surely their professional authority which was so much admired and upon which all us amateurs fed so eagerly. To know ourselves is one of the highest objectives of Christian activity, and I am convinced that it is necessary for us amateurs to remind ourselves frequently that we are not professionals, and that we have a different and attainable, though no less worthy standard at which we should aim. To realise this and accept it would be to do away with a great deal of the frustration which can bedevil our work.

Since I am now myself pastorally concerned with members of the theatrical profession as Secretary of the Actors' Church Union, I have persuaded Mrs. Frances Glendenning to write the regular report of the London Theatre. She has a wide experience of both writing and production, and will write with extra authority on the plays she sees.

A PERSONAL VIEW

(Being a long letter attempting to agree with the Editor)

from DONALD SWANN

May 21st, 1959.

SIR,

I agree strongly with John Hester in his editorial to the Spring issue, when he urges that Christian hope should appear in our plays and musicals. I don't wish shows to be doctrinaire, nor that they should all finish with a hymn, nor necessarily that Christ should be mentioned. But if neither He, nor God, nor the Holy Spirit play any role in the actions and motives of the characters, if the transcendent is forgotten and the Cross ignored, then it is a non-Christian show, and to that extent " animal " rather than " human ". However, most of the shows I have ever seen were written by non-Christians; much talent and inspiration lie in the hands of doubters and pagans. Of these I am most of all grateful to the *positive* don't-knows who at least show the good if not the Glory.

Having written music for so-called " escapist " works I should like to put up a defence for their positive values. I refer to musical comedies, farces, revues, etc. Sheer enjoyment, fun, idiocy, rousing melody, slapstick, charm (unsickly), deftness and wit are, to my mind, positive values and healing to the spirit. In our farrago Michael Flanders and I were pleased if we were able just to entertain an audience for an hour or two. But we have been amazed and encouraged to receive letters from strangers in our audience thanking us for an alleviation of the spirit, literally. One came from Berlin; our show had renewed his faith in the brotherhood of man, said our correspondent; he was able to return to Berlin and face the political confusion. An Armenian journalist in Cyprus (in the bad old days) used to play our record in Murder Mile after dark to keep himself cheerful. (A fortiori, once we read in the paper of some children who were shut off in a seaside cave by the rising tide. They sang our " Mud! Mud! Glorious Mud! " and at the last minute they were rescued!)

I have had little to do with the " tragic " side of the theatre. I just see a few things occasionally. Still I find it true in ordinary life that when you get to the sad side of things, when you face " realities " as people say, if you are not aware of the presence of God you inevitably see more horrors than there are. Thus when seeing *Look Back in Anger* and *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* I wanted to leave my seat and inform the characters and the author (if I could lay my hands on him) that on a certain night the angels had given a message to some poor shepherds. It consisted of tidings of great joy, and that if they

(the author and his characters) persisted in disregarding this vital news (as they patently did) I should have to tell my friends that this play presented a biased and distorted view of life. Nor do I care a jot about the so-called plea that what they present might be " modern realism ". If you leave God out, you are downright unrealistic, whether your characters are squalid or high-born. Nor in this 1959th Year of our Lord have I much patience with two tramps, however symbolic, who are *still* waiting for Godot or God. May I describe what I think is fair? In *The Brothers Karamazov* Dosteovsky draws an arch villain, the Grand Inquisitor. Who does the Grand Inquisitor get to talk to him, to argue with him? Christ. From what I remember of *Paradise Lost*, Satan tends to hog the stage. This I think is my objection to many contemporary plays I have seen and read. Satan tends to hog the stage. Christ is unrepresented, or His friends misrepresented. (I just don't think I can face another show of any sort with an effete social worker or a simpering priest).

Jumping to music for a moment, I believe that the reconciling factor in modern dissonant music is beauty. I wish there were more of it. This of course is entirely subjective. Who's to know what I find beautiful? Fortunately in the works of Schönberg, Honneger, and certain others, there are passages that glorify and transfigure the harshness of the medium they have chosen. Or Berg, for example; I found *Wozzeck* beautiful, though it's also horrid. In *West Side Story*, powerful though the whole effect is, I missed a lyrical side to Bernstein's music. It left me hungry. I know this is highly personal. Yet I feel there is an alchemy that can turn dissonance into magic. Lyricism in music, corresponding to poetry in drama, ennobles, heightens and exalts the work so that the Divine element is introduced, may be without the author intending it. The Light, if not invoked, shines through.

Way beyond this artistic theorising is God Himself. Anyhow that's how I see it. It is His beauty, His truth, His power, His illumination and His original inspiration. Either we reveal this in what we write or we don't. I wish there were a dramatist in the theatre with C. S. Lewis's command of the numinous. If there were, all I would have to do would be to quote from him. Fortunately in art we can hope for the unexpected. Everyone is all for realism, and out comes a fantasist and proves the Divinity of fantasy; we're all for prose and then comes a poet and proves the Majesty of poetry; we're all contrapuntal, and along comes a harmonist and displays the Glory of harmony—(Monteverdi?). Most of all at this time, I hope, with John Hester, that in an age of unbelievers, a believer should appear and prove triumphantly in the theatre the one thing that above all things needs no proof, the existence of God in Christ.

Yours faithfully,

DONALD SWANN.

THE CHARACTER OF RELIGIOUS DRAMA

A Lecture delivered at the 1959 Summer School

By DAVID WILLIAM

I suppose there will always be a much readier agreement about what religious drama is not than what it is. No-one, presumably, will want to canvas, say, for Mrs. Agatha Christie as a candidate, or Mr. Noel Coward, or, setting one's sights a little higher, Oscar Wilde or Goldsmith or Pinero. But already I may have gone too far. I have heard it said, and said by officers of this society, that there were religious overtones in *Expresso Bongo*. I cannot attribute this to anything but a sweet and exalted liberty of mind which, after the fashion of the banished duke in *As You Like It*, can find:

". . . books in the running brookes,
Sermons in stones, and good in every thing."

Harder hearts like mine require more specific terms of reference if one is not to be shipwrecked on desert islands of subjectivity and wishful thinking. One must use what maps and compasses there are. One must attempt to formulate, define, and exclude.

There was an article by Mr. Tom Driver in the spring number of *Christian Drama* which, under the somewhat minatory title—*Is That Play Christian* ? sets out the requisite qualities for a " Christian "* play. They are, to my mind, unexceptionable, and it may be useful, at this point, to summarise them. A Christian play should establish, he says, a belief in:

(i) Human responsibility; i.e., that, even within the context of an indifferent fatality, a man has a measure of objectively significant choice and freedom of action.
(ii) A world in which time and history are relevant to the action of the play.
(iii) A world in which redemption is both necessary and possible, and can only be effected through love.
(iv) The sovereignty of God, and the central position occupied by Jesus Christ in relation to the interpretation of history, and to all human love.

Granted that Mr. Driver's criteria are unexceptionable, perhaps one's first reaction to them is—" Where are the Christian plays that incorporate them? " In insisting on so firm and uncompromising a diet for the body and soul of Christian drama, may one not risk condemning it to artistic starvation? Might one not be emptying the baby with the bath-water?

Mr. Driver is well aware of this paradox, and it is, in fact, his treatment of it at the end of his article which I want to take as my own point of departure. " This list does not help us to judge the depth of a playwright's penetration into the existential predicaments of man. It does not tell us why we might . . . prefer the work of Tennessee Williams to that of dozens of ' Christian playwrights ' who could leap over these . . . hurdles with ease. The list is useful . . . only in the task of determining what intellectual qualities a given play

* Note (i). Of course, religious drama is not necessarily to be equated with Christian drama; what is arguably the greatest religious drama ever written—the tragedies of Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides—is pre-Christian.

has which move it nearer to the Christian reading of life and what qualities separate it from the Christian point of view. It is thus a sort of doctrinal formulation. We must remember that, although doctrine has been indispensable to the Church, doctrine has never completely encompassed the Church's concern with life. With doctrine we judge the cultural forms of the world, one of which is theatre. But the cultural forms of the world also judge our doctrine."

Here, I suggest, lies the root of the paradox, a root which proliferates, as far as the Church is concerned, some very recalcitrant branches. How is it that the country which did more than any other to lay the foundations of western civilisation, the country whose culture was preoccupied with the possibilities of spiritual perfection, the country that produced not only the source of European drama but also most of its summits—the *Oresteia*, the *Oedipus* plays, the *Antigone*, the *Bacchae*—that this country required no doctrinal formulation for its religious expression? Whereas, on the other hand, the firmer the adherence to the doctrinal propositions of Christianity, the worse it has been for drama.

I said earlier that it was easier to say what religious drama was not than what it was. But one must be more seriously exclusive if the term is to have any critical vitality. One must exclude some of the most zealous claimants: pseudo-Biblical drama, for example. Year in, year out, parish churches sponsor allegedly dramatic versions of the Nativity, the Passion, and other Biblical subjects. The three kings shuffle to and fro attired in someone's drawing-room curtains, and St. Joseph's dialect ranges from Land's End to John O'Groats. It is all, no doubt, quite justifiable as a method of evangelism for the uninstructed, but most of it is not Christian drama because it is culturally exhausted.

" Last season's fruit is eaten
And the fullfed beast shall kick the empty pail."

I have cited, of course, the most literal example of what aspires to the species of Christian drama, and for that reason the easiest to prosecute. The real problem does not lie in that direction—the problem of reconciling cultural truth with religious truth as set down in terms of doctrine. To do that, one must, in Mr. Driver's words, let " the cultural forms of the world judge the doctrine ". Except that I propose to concentrate on only one form, the drama, and for the crux of my argument on only one play. One could perhaps approach the subject the other way round, and set out on a tour of the large continent of English drama from the miracle plays to Mr. Eliot (not to mention the drama of other countries); the advantages of this would be breadth of example and historical range. But I feel safer with the less diffuse way, in the hope of sharper illustration and clearer outline.

So I am concentrating on a writer who not only reflects the culture of his own age, but " looking before and after " seems to speak to-day with a voice astonishing in its prophetic authority. That voice, I need hardly say, is Shakespeare's.

No-one ever gets tired of trying to prove something about Shakespeare, and as often as not, ends up by proving something about himself; witness Coleridge's pleasant admission in mid-stream of dissertation that he had " a smack of Hamlet " himself.

Nowadays we are even more zealous than our ancestors in the promotion of the Shakespeare industry. One could construct a dozen alphabets of all the individuals and organisations who have involved themselves; for example, A for John Quincy Adams, Amateurs, and Robert Atkins, B for Burbage and the B.B.C., C for critics and cranks—the last two categories being all too often combined in one. It is a melancholy thought, in passing, that it would take a very small percentage of the money Shakespeare has earned for his purveyors to build a theatre in his country in which his plays could be performed on the sort of stage for which they were written.

I hope nobody will suspect me of underestimating the omniscience of the Divine Programme when I suggest that the birth of Shakespeare in 1564 was a happy historical accident. When Elizabeth came to the throne in 1558, the problems of achieving peace and security within the realm were immense. Not only did she have to steer the vessel of the Church past the Scylla of Rome; there was also the Charybdis of Geneva. Calvinism had already taken root in the country, biding its time until the dangers of re-conversion to Rome had receded enough for it to make its own claims on the faith of the country. Thus Shakespeare grew up at a time when the cause of religion was central in people's lives.

To what extent Shakespeare interested himself in any of these controversies we cannot precisely tell; the plays maintain what Professor Alexander has called " an ironic reserve " towards any distinct denominational commitment. Yet that he had a strong sense of the follies and dangers of Puritanism is clear enough—comically in Malvolio, almost tragically in Angelo. Puritanism is a large and rather ambiguous term. By Shakespeare's time it had grown from its ascetic and anti-clerical roots in mediaeval Catholicism. In its severest form it prescribed not only drastic reduction of liturgical ceremony, but a rigid sabbatarianism along with a narrow, repressive morality. From this spirit the work of Shakespeare is gloriously free. He invariably presents the social and sexual manifestations of this aspect of Puritanism unfavourably. But it is untrue to think that Puritanism was merely a religion of Thou Shalt Not. It had its positive aspect also—that ideal of spiritual perfection which finds its noblest expression perhaps in Milton's *Comus*. There are sympathetic glimpses of it in Shakespeare too, perhaps most notably in the betrothal of Ferdinand and Miranda.

Shakespeare's attitude to the clergy—both Protestant and Roman Catholic—is almost always sympathetic, and where not so, as in the portrait of Pandulph in *King John*, it is because the character is temporally, rather than spiritually, committed.

On the whole, there can be little doubt that the central principles of Christianity are part of Shakespeare's dramatic world-picture. (Nor is this tantamount to saying that the man subscribed to the beliefs we think we find expressed by the artist.) But it is time to summon the evidence of the plays. *Measure for Measure*, for example, is a play that derives much of its power from dramatised religious conflict. As in *The Merchant of Venice*, the conflict is between the spirit of the law and its letter, or to put it another way,

between mercy and justice. There is no greater tribute to the mystery of the Incarnation in all Shakespeare than Isabella's plea to Angelo for her brother's life. Angelo, the voice of the recorded law, declares:

" Your Brother is a forfeit of the Law,
And you but waste your words."

The voice of charity replies:

" Alas, alas:
Why all the soules that were, were forfeit once,
And he that might the vantage best have tooke,
Found out the remedie: how would you be,
If he, which is the top of Judgement, should
But judge you, as you are? "

And there are other occasions—Helena's claim to save the King of France's life, Portia in Venice, Henry V before Agincourt, Desdemona protesting her innocence—where Shakespeare writes in positive alignment with traditional Christian doctrine. Yet in none of these plays, I think, is one made conscious of the Christian commitment *dominating* the play; contributing to it, yes, widening its emotional scope, sanctioning an argument here, elevating a character there, but still not giving the play a determination which one could unhesitatingly call Christian. Not fulfilling the last of Mr. Driver's criteria—" the acknowledgement that Christ is central to the interpretation of history and to the reclamation of the true loves of man ". We do not feel, as we may feel with *Murder In The Cathedral* or some of the plays of Claudel, that Christian doctrine has principally influenced their creation.

There is, however, one play of Shakespeare, and I think only one, where it is possible to feel that this fusion of doctrine and drama has taken place. Perhaps not consistently, not completely, but somewhat in the manner of two parallel lines, of which one is doctrine and the other drama. The lines run parallel for a time, then intersect and run as one, then separate again. The play I mean is *Hamlet*.

If you want a quick impression of the state of the English theatre at any given moment, whether in the production, writing, or acting of plays, the best clue lies in the contemporary presentations of Shakespeare. The stage-history of *Hamlet* (the most frequently performed play in the canon) provides numerous examples. There is a picture of the closet-scene from an 1861 production with Phelps as Hamlet. The prince is a figure of middle-aged respectability, his right arm raised in a gesture of admonishing rectitude, whilst his mother crouches beside him in an attitude of guilt-laden meekness. The Victorian sense of duty is the theme. It is only one or two removes from a parody of Mr. Gladstone reminding fallen women of the way back. But one must not mock Phelps. Only a few years earlier, Macready had, with difficulty, finally prevented prostitutes from plying their trade at Covent Garden during performances; it is, therefore, understandable that actors and managers should have felt obliged to present images of unimpeachable virtue on and off the stage.

Modern productions of *Hamlet* mirror our own age and its theatrical taste no less accurately. The influence of psychology has been most effective,

and Hamlet himself thrust into innumerable consulting-rooms, whence very varied diagnoses of his personal relationships have, from time to time, emerged, viz, incestuous (the Queen), homosexual (Horatio), whilst a recent production offered us an Ophelia who pounced on the mad-scene to tell us all she had misunderstood about Shakespeare's debt to Freud. The current preoccupation with visual distraction has also been in evidence; the lessons of Poel and Granville Barker are still only half-learnt, and we have had modern-dress Hamlets, Ruritanian Hamlets, Byronic Hamlets, and eighteenth-century Hamlets. Difference is made a higher artistic principle than truth and beauty. The pinnacular enthusiasm for the ballet at the end of the war was reflected in a production with Mr. Robert Helpmann as a Hamlet who had apparently got mislaid in Elsinore on his way from Swan Lake to the analyst.

But perhaps modern productions of the play reflect the temper of the age nowhere so clearly as their persistent secularity, their neglect of the religious aspect of what is one of the peaks, not only of our own culture, but of the world's.

Don't misunderstand me; I am not about to offer an interpretation of *Hamlet* as a piece of dramatic evangelism. What I think the play presents is a version of the religious nature of human experience so profound in its application and so broad in its scope that it cannot but illuminate the question of religious drama in general. I believe the play is not properly intelligible without reference to Christian doctrine, and that, at a certain point, it abandons its dramatic adherence to that doctrine, and passes into a less magnetised religious orbit.

The opening of the play is one of the most masterly in all drama. Within twenty lines, both place and mood are established—the castle battlements at midnight, cold, and a sense of apprehension immediate as the guards change and speak of the strange figure they have twice seen. Then—and it has to be a very incompetent production that does not communicate something of the suspense and awe of this moment—they break off their excited whispering as, in full armour, frowning and silver-bearded, the majesty of buried Denmark comes slow and stately by. Even the sceptical Horatio is convinced, and interprets the apparition as a sign of impending catastrophe.

But up to this moment, we are ethically, so to speak, in the dark. We do not know the sort of society these men inhabit, the values and beliefs they hold. Then enlightenment comes, and comes in words so famous and beautiful that they have even found their way inside Christmas cards, though productions of the play have not scrupled to omit them, on the grounds that they are merely " poetic " (whatever that is supposed to mean).

The soldiers have noticed that the ghost seemed about to speak, but then vanished when the cock crew. One of them adds:

" Some sayes, that ever 'gainst that Season comes,
Wherein our Saviours Birth is celebrated,
The Bird of Dawning singeth all night long:
And then (they say) no Spirit can walke abroad,
The nights are wholesome, then no Planets strike,
No Faiery talkes, nor Witch hath power to Charme:
So hallow'd, and so gracious is the time."

SIR JOHN GIELGUD AS *HAMLET*

(Photo by Cecil Beaton; reproduced by permission of the Editor of "Theatre World"

These lines are the first intimation in the play that we are in a Christian country. The subsequent scenes confirm and expand this impression. The matter and observance of Christian doctrine are kept in the foreground until almost the end of the play, and our understanding of the whole picture cannot be complete unless we recognise this.

Hamlet himself attests his acceptance of Christian belief as soon as he is alone. Exclaiming against the ugliness and futility of existence, he longs for the death he cannot inflict on himself because of the " Cannon 'gainst Selfe-slaughter ". When, presently, he himself confronts the spectre of his dead father, such is the shock of the experience, his disposition shaken with thoughts beyond the reaches of his soul, that he sees in the supernatural solicitation the agency of the devil as like as God's.

The Ghost's story of his murder is in complete accordance with Catholic theology. Not only was his own brother the assassin—the " primall eldesst " crime—but he was:

" Cut off even in the Blossomes of my Sinne,
Unhouzzled, disappointed, unnaneld . . . . ."

i.e., without benefit of the sacraments of penance and extreme unction, but sent to his account with all his imperfections on his head. The deed is so blasphemous that it must not go unrequited. And so the dead king returns to earth to lay the appalling burden on his son. As the rest of the play is to show, that burden is too heavy, not because Hamlet is weak or ineffectual as romantic critics and actors have implied, and—here is an example of Shakespeare's supreme irony—as Hamlet himself suggests, but because he is too human. To a man so imaginatively susceptible to the claims of humanity, the Ghost's assignment is superhuman. In a sense, therefore, the " villain " of the play is not Claudius, but the Ghost.

A further aspect of this tremendous scene is that, of course, the Ghost never suggests that Hamlet should kill the King; this would hardly earn him remission from purgatory. His instructions, on the other hand, are strictly ethical:

" But howsoever thou pursuest this Act,
Taint not thy mind; nor let thy Soule contrive
Against thy Mother ought; leave her to heaven. . . ."

The next scenes show Claudius suspicious of Hamlet's assumed madness, and setting spies to test its genuineness. Move for move, Hamlet is a match for them all. He knows the measure of his adversary, but is powerless to act. For what can he do? He has no proof of the King's guilt, nothing beyond the word of a ghost, which has not, I fancy, been acceptable legal tender in any time or place.

Gradually his dilemma hardens. Part of him believes the Ghost's word, and that part prompts the violent strictures of the part that doubts. In this way the armies of passion and reason, the primitive instincts and the civilised sensibilities are mobilised to fight not only each other, but among themselves for possession of the soul of Hamlet; the tragic conflict is engaged.

To make the assurance he has doubly sure, he gets a visiting company of players to re-enact the details of the murder in the presence of the court. As Claudius rushes from the scene calling for lights, Hamlet knows he can

take the Ghost's word for a thousand pounds. But the initiative is not long with Hamlet, for Claudius now knows he knows, and loses no time in sending him out of the country on the pretext of his madness.

Presently the King, alone for the first time in the play, examines his own spiritual state, and examines it in the unwinking light of an instructed Christian conscience. His sense of guilt is strong, but his ambition is stronger, and he knows what this must mean:

> " But oh, what forme of Prayer
> Can serve my turne? Forgive me my foule Murther:
> That cannot be, since I am still possest
> Of those effects for which I did the Murther.
> My Crowne, mine owne Ambition, and my Queene:
> May one be pardon'd, and retaine th' offence?
> In the corrupted currants of this world,
> Offences gilded hand may shove by Justice,
> And oft 'tis seene, the wicked prize it selfe
> Buyes out the Law; but 'tis not so above,
> There is no shuffling, there the Action lyes
> In his true Nature . . . ."

There can be no need to attempt any elucidation of this magnificent speech. Its clarity, its tension, and above all, its irony give it a dramatic power which can only be enhanced if the production has put us in touch from the beginning of the play with those religious terms of reference which the speech invokes.

Unable to find words that will help him to any resolution, the King appeals to the angelic host, and kneels in silent prayer. Suddenly Hamlet appears. As he catches sight of his unsuspecting enemy, we reach the heart of the play. Yet how often is this scene treated on the stage as an opportunity for relaxing tension between the play-scene, just past, and the closet-scene to come. But it is the first moment in the play that Hamlet and the King, the two most important characters, are alone together; and as Hamlet's first line suggests, it may also be the last:

> " Now might I do it pat, now he is praying. . . ."

In the ensuing speech he proceeds to find reasons for postponing his revenge to a more appropriate moment—reasons which so shocked Dr. Johnson that he considered them a flaw in the play. But Johnson surely makes the mistake of treating the speech too literally. He overlooks the power of Shakespeare's irony; and to be sure of appreciating that, we need the added dimension of the stage. Consider the actual scene. Hamlet suddenly encounters the King who is totally defenceless. His immediate impulse is to kill him. His nature at once sets up an instinctive reaction. To kill a defenceless man at his prayers is to contradict his own nature, to betray those sensibilities that have ever given beauty and meaning to life, that made him the creature Ophelia saw as:

> " The glasse of Fashion, and the mould of Forme. . . ."

Hamlet's especial predicament, his knowledge of the King's guilt, his bitter sense of action too long delayed, prompt him to find reasons for rejecting this opportunity for revenge; all the reasons, that is to say, but the right one. For if he acknowledges the truth of his nature to himself, he will never kill the

King, never find just and sustaining reasons for it. And when at last he does so, it is in the heat of the moment, without reflection, and with the hand of death already on his shoulder. *It is the only way.*

Here then, in these two great speeches which express the moral dilemmas of the King and the Prince, the play reaches its climax.

From there, events move swiftly. Hamlet puts up his sword and joins his mother. Claudius rises from the struggle with his conscience. Having prayed (and prayed sincerely) for remission of the penalties for one murder, he departs to arrange another—Hamlet's.

On his way to England, Hamlet encounters part of the Norwegian army, and the sight of so large a troop going out to death and destruction for a little patch of ground renews his bitterness at his own inactivity. His humility of spirit prevents him from seeing that the challenge of creative passivity is subtler and more difficult to face than the challenge of action. As he is to learn, action may mean flight *from* reality.

He has, of course, suspected the King's motives in sending him to England, and, once on board ship, discovers the plot against his life, escapes from his escorts, and returns to Denmark, where he is met by Horatio. On their way back to the court, they pass through a graveyard.

The Hamlet of this scene seems changed. It is not simply that the mood is one of meditation and pause. In the contrast between the coarse, practical gravedigger, careless of the significance of his work, and the oppressed figure of intellect and imagination, a new dimension seems to be admitted to the play. It is at this point, I think, that the adherence to Christian values is loosened, and to Christian doctrine abandoned. The guarantees of existence grow vaguer and more distant. Yet as Hamlet holds the skull of Yorick, the jester he had played with as a boy, and meditates so movingly on the vanity and finitude of all earthly things, the pain and pressure of his own situation seem for a moment to lift. Drawing back from the agony of proximity to his own predicament, he sees it in relation to the vast and mysterious background of death. And his view is much closer to the stoicism of the ancients than to the doctrine of the Resurrection.

Ophelia's funeral projects him back into the exigencies of the present, and he fights Laertes in her grave.

The final scene begins. Claudius has set yet another trap for Hamlet, a duel with poisoned rapier, and sends Osric to bear the challenge. Once again we are made conscious of that irony which enriches everything it touches. For we recognise behind Osric's rhetorical absurdities and posturings the presence of the messenger of death. And Hamlet recognises it too. He cannot refuse the duel. Having insulted Laertes at his sister's funeral, he owes him, in honour, the courtesy of accepting an apparently friendly challenge. It is something in Osric's behaviour, his persistence, his willingness to endure the humiliations of Hamlet's wit in order to obtain an acceptance that arouses Hamlet's suspicions. He knows his enemies. Alone with Horatio he voices his apprehension, and Horatio at once offers to forestall the duel. Hamlet silences him :

> " Not a whit, we defie Augury; there's a speciall Providence in the fall of a sparrow. If it be now, 'tis not to come: if it bee not to come,

it will bee now: if it be not now; yet it will come; the readinesse is all, since no man ha's ought of what he leaves. What is't to leave betimes?"

What do these words mean? The Christian ear will, in the first place, have responded to the line about the fall of a sparrow and its evocation of older words than Hamlet's: "Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father." The allusion to St. Matthew is surely deliberate; what are we to make of it? Are we perhaps expected, in view of the dramatic context, to remember the preceding verse? "And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul." Perhaps, and if so, is Shakespeare, after all, restoring to his hero the faith and values beyond which he had so recently seemed to pass? I think not. In view of the rest of the speech, and the rest of the play, I think that the allusion, whilst deliberate, even reverent, is once more ironic. There is to be no commitment.

But if what used to be called the consolations of religion are not in Hamlet's mind at this moment, what is? With the premonition of death so close upon him, what is it that enables him to face it with such fortitude?

Acceptance, readiness, ripeness, all these words perhaps may be relevant to his state of mind at this moment; yet how inadequate they are; for what can describe the situation of one who seems to have achieved an infinite consciousness? It is not merely death that Hamlet accepts in this speech, but life too, *his* life, with all its evil and mischance and mystery. Here at last then, the discords of existence are resolved into an elegiac harmony; here at last the Prince of Denmark becomes the captain of his soul.

Within ten minutes of this moment, the play is over. If any doubt remains that Hamlet dies beyond the reach of Christian solace, it must surely be removed by his last words. Here a curious point arises. My quotations from the play have all been from the First Folio text. The play first appeared, however, in the Quarto version of 1603. This text differs very much from the Folio—for one thing it is a lot shorter—and a comparison of the two versions of Hamlet's last lines is revealing. The Folio has:

"I cannot live to heare the Newes from England,
But I do prophesie th'election lights
On Fortinbras, he ha's my dying voyce,
So tell him with the occurrents more and lesse,
Which have solicited. The rest is silence. O, o, o, o."

Whereas the Quarto has:

"O my heart sinckes Horation,
Mine eyes have lost their sight, my tongue his use:
Farewel Horation, heaven receive my soule."

Without venturing into the difficult territory of textual criticism, one can only assume that, in eliminating from the later and fuller text all reference to an after-life, Shakespeare had decided that the claims of tragedy outweighed those of doctrine. None of the other tragic heroes dies a Christian death. In the most authentic version of the play there is, Hamlet is no exception.

In order to draw some conclusions that may help to solve some of the problems raised earlier in this lecture, one must now, I think, probe a little into the nature of the experience received from what is called tragedy.

What is it that generates so mysterious a feeling at the end of a tragedy? What satisfaction do we get from these plays with their tremendous visions of suffering and frustration? Obviously each of us will have our own more or less conscious answer to that question, yet I believe a collective answer may be made too.

One impression, perhaps, will be the sense of waste; the reflection that society is not so rich that it can afford the loss of its most adventurous and imaginative figures. At the same time, for all their positive values, it cannot accommodate them without threat to its own order and stability. It must outlaw them or their own activities may overthrow it.

Hamlet, we should remember, is of all Shakespeare's tragic heroes initially more sinned against than sinning. Macbeth and Lear and Antony, on the other hand, more or less voluntarily embark on their fatal courses. Yet, with their deaths too, we feel the same sense of waste. What is it that these apparently different characters must have in common that their deaths evoke the tragic response? What is the quality that makes their heroic stature also their death-warrant?

It is, I think, to put it briefly, a fatal capacity for being themselves; for satisfying the demands of their nature whatever opposition the world sets up against them. What do I mean by " being themselves "? When Othello and Desdemona are re-united in Cyprus, he greets her with these words:

> " If it were now to dye,
> 'Twere now to be most happy. For I feare,
> My Soule hath her content so absolute,
> That not another comfort like to this,
> Succeedes in unknown fate."

What is he talking about? Well, I suggest that in the first place, he is being himself. The literal meaning is no more than " I'm extremely happy to see you again, so happy, in fact, that I can't imagine ever being happier for the rest of my life ". Yet the effect of this is quite different. It is merely the language of the world. The literal meaning of the speech, of course, is not the point. What we must receive is its poetic meaning, which is much more complex. Firstly, there is the single-minded splendour of feeling that can only find adequate expression in such exalted language; secondly, there is its place in the dramatic context, spoken in the presence of the man who has committed himself to ensuring that not another comfort like to this *does* succeed in unknown fate. Thirdly, there is its universality. As soon as we hear the great words, we recognise in them the ideal expression of all that we could feel and say in such a situation if we were not pre-committed to the distractions of life which blur our consciousness and mar our utterance. For a moment the poet gives a passport to our imaginations, and we understand the rapture of Othello because potentially it is our rapture too. And only such an intensity of self-expression as his can make us understand it.

So it is with all the tragic heroes. Our sympathy with them is not in relation to their moral standards. Octavia's domestic arrangements are, if family life is not to become altogether a thing of the past, a good deal more exemplary than Cleopatra's; but Cleopatra is a great tragic figure, and Octavia is not, just because of this, or because of its corollary that, whereas Octavia conforms to standards and values laid down independently of herself,

Cleopatra can conform to nothing but the values of her own nature, and whilst this may be socially disastrous, its spiritual results are quite different. Indeed, I think we may now say that this quality of self-determination which seems to be the one quality common to all the tragic protagonists is, when it reaches the intensity of expression I have tried to indicate, a moral quality no less admirable, in *tragic* terms, than courage, or honesty, or loyalty.

It is this, I suggest, that makes tragedy not only bearable, but the highest form of aesthetic experience possible—this sense that for those who cannot accommodate themselves to the world's demands without perhaps denying the most precious part of their nature, the world is indeed well lost.

But this view is not readily reconcilable with the teachings of Christianity, so that, for that reason we may not call Shakespeare a religious dramatist in the doctrinal sense of the word.

Yet if, as I have tried to suggest, tragedy goes so surely to the heart of human experience, if its picture of the spiritual energy of which man may be capable is so true and so beautiful, what value can the word " religious " have if it it is not applicable to *Hamlet*?

There is an element of vagueness in all this. It is intentional. We tend nowadays to regard vagueness as a fault in all modes of thought; where the use of words is concerned, that is plainly right. Yet, on another level, vagueness is only a comparative term. We might call the paintings of Turner vague in comparison with those of Ingres. Their outlines lack the precision of the latter's; but they are greater works of art, and in their essence, far from vague.

One of the devices of tragedy that exploits this kind of vagueness—committed and allusive—is symbolism. Dramatic symbols have a particular meaning within the context of the play, and, at the same time, adumbrate a moral significance beyond it. It is in the power of his symbols that Shakespeare matches the Greek tragedians.

There is a moment in *King Lear* for example, when Lear, at the height of his misfortunes, rejected by the daughters on whom he had showered his hopes and his possessions, kneels down in the wind and the rain and the thunder to pray for the destitute. In that moment, what we should see is, not simply an old man behaving very pathetically, but an image of the principle of love, asserting its indestructible primacy. That is what I mean by a symbol. Other moments spring to mind—Cassandra, captive and silent outside the palace at Argos, Cleopatra robing herself again for Cydnus, the prisoners' chorus in *Fidelio*, Antigone going out to bury her dead. In all these moments we behold the human spirit overcoming the world.

If, therefore, it is one of the functions of religion to guarantee the potential nobility of the human spirit, then it is a function which we must admit the poets have discharged no less fitly than the priests. If it is another to suggest that, in its finest moments, that same spirit seems to require a better habitation than this world, how can we usefully withhold the term " religious " from the tragedies of Shakespeare, even though they may not incorporate the apparatus of doctrine? For in its very aspiration, in those moments of

[*Continued at the foot of page 19.*

REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE OF THE UPPER HOUSE OF THE CONVOCATION OF YORK ON RELIGIOUS DRAMA

The Committee consisted of the Bishop of Sheffield (Chairman), the Bishop of Manchester and the Bishop of Wakefield

The members of the Upper House, when they discussed religious drama at the session of January 13th, 1959, found themselves in agreement in their desire to encourage the performance of good religious plays and to support the work of the Religious Drama Society of Great Britain. They were aware that the number of plays which were both good " theatre " and also worthy in their presentation of the Christian faith and life was still small, and that often plays were being written and produced, sometimes in a church, which had little or no merit. Often episcopal approval of a poor play was not sought until preparations and rehearsals were so far advanced that a refusal to give approval would cause disappointment and resentment. Some of the bishops who had been disposed to encourage the performance of plays in churches were, in the light of further experience, more reluctant to do so unless they could be sure that both the play and the quality of the performance were of a high standard. While the bishops do not wish to discourage local initiative or to limit the discretion of individual bishops, they thought that it would be desirable, especially in fairness to touring companies of players, if they could agree on general principles covering (1) the performance of plays in churches and (2) the visual presentation of our Lord (and the Holy Family), on which they would act in their dioceses.

The committee of bishops to which the matter was referred submitted the following statement of general principles for the consideration of the House: including two slight amendments, the Report as adopted on April 28th, 1959 reads:

Principles corporately agreed by the Bishops of the Province of York for their own guidance:

1. For the Performance of Religious Drama in Churches

(*a*) Before any performance is given in a church the bishop must be consulted and give his consent. The bishop will give his consent to the incumbent and churchwardens who should apply with the approval of the parochial church council, for permission to have a religious play performed in their church, provided:

(i) that it does not interfere with the statutory services (although on a special occasion the statutory service might be said not at the usual hour);

(ii) that an open stage is normally used such as does not obscure the sanctuary or involve the removal or moving of furniture and ornaments which could not normally be removed without a faculty;

(iii) that the play and the manner of its presentation have been approved by the Ordinary on the recommendation of his advisers appointed for this purpose;

(iv) that the play and the proposals for its production should be submitted to the Ordinary before rehearsals have begun, and in the

case of a new play six months before the intended date of production;

(v) that no money for admission is taken at the door. It is of course legitimate to make a collection. The practice of selling programmes, either at the door or in advance, is one to which the bishops should give further consideration. It might appear to obscure the right of free access to a parish church by all parishioners, and if it became frequent it might provoke the civil authorities to claim that a church building should become rateable.

(*b*) Generally it is preferable to produce religious drama on a properly appointed and lighted stage in a hall or out of doors, and to see that the right atmosphere is created by the way it is produced and performed.

2. For the Visual Presentation of our Lord whether in Church or elsewhere

(1) The guiding consideration is whether or not the representation is likely to evoke faith and increase belief in Him as the Way, the Truth and the Life, the Saviour, Redeemer and only-begotten Son.

(2) The representation, and other parts of the play, should be *anonymous*. (It is better that the person who takes the part should be unknown to the audience.)

(3) A stylised representation, especially of scenes like the Last Supper and the Crucifixion, can be more readily allowed, provided there is fidelity to the narration and to sound doctrine, than a realistic presentation.

(4) A more realistic representation is better if seen at a distance, i.e., as at Ober-Ammergau or at York; therefore better not in a church.

(5) Such a performance should be prepared over a long period, and should when given be a dedicated offering in humility and reverence.

(6) The play should be true in its theology and in its religious feeling, and of a high standard, however simple, in all respects.

(7) It should only be performed under conditions which have the written approval of the bishop on the recommendation of his advisers. This approval should never be given unless he has been consulted when the project was first proposed.

"*The Character of Religious Drama*", *continued from page 17.*]

its intensest self-awareness, may not the spirit, in some profound, unconscious depths, turn in remembrance, like an exile immedicably homesick, towards that other region whence it came?

Beyond this point I don't feel competent to venture. The character of religious drama must inherit the character of one of its parents—religion. Our response to that is ultimately so personal and mysterious that in trying to circumscribe it too closely, we risk losing it.

The soldiers in *Hamlet* sensed something of this when their swords provided no obstruction to the passage of the Ghost:

"... We doe it wrong, being so Majesticall
To offer it the shew of Violence,
For it is as the Ayre, invulnerable,
And our vaine blowes, malicious Mockery."

LONDON THEATRE

By FRANCES GLENDENNING

Going to a new play is exciting but going to a play in a new theatre in the City of London is a historic occasion. Perhaps the sense of history conspired to make the new Mermaid Theatre itself even more memorable than its first play *Lock up your Daughters*, a musical play adapted by Bernard Miles from a comedy by Henry Fielding.

The entrance to the theatre, once the red fluted pillars are behind, is not unlike a busy air terminal. In the large open foyer theatregoers scurry or stroll, emerging from the bars with drinks, coffee, sausages, salads, until the handbell summons them to climb the two short flights of steps to the landing. Here homage can be paid to the names of private and public benefactors whose generosity together with Bernard Miles' vision enable the audience to move from the spacious foyer into an intimate blue seated, bare-walled auditorium where programmes are laid out on every other seat.

The set for *Lock up your Daughters* was without curtains and the orchestra was audible and a little visible *behind* the stage.

All this contributes to that intimate atmosphere, peculiar to the theatre, and sometimes only experienced after years at the local rep.

It was surprising therefore that the audience did not laugh more freely at *Lock up your Daughters*, but perhaps the stretches of relative tedium were more to blame for cooling the audience's hilarity. The only rival to Hy Hazell's energy and vigour was the man who worked the winch for the revolving stage.

From the new Mermaid to the Old Vic where *As You Like It* has been running. Long experience of touring religious drama with a minimum of scenery and props makes me favourably disposed towards a " fussy " production and I was only sorry that Wendy Toye's elaborations did not include the Forest of Arden itself. The few stunted trees were too much of an understatement from an otherwise lavish producer and designer. The eighteenth-century dresses swished by pleasantly enough until the forest scenes where the eighteenth-century equivalent of doublet and hose gave the lovely Rosalind (Barbara Jefford) the air of a principal boy from Dick Whittington. Celia (Maggie Smith) was too pert by half to be Rosalind's bosom friend. Touchstone (Alec McCowen) owed his success partly to his adherance to the preacher's dictum, " When the argument is weak, speak up ".

Congreve's *The Double Dealer* comes from the period of history where relations between church and theatre were finally severed. " High " church and puritans were united in their opposition to the theatre which had lost its links with the community as a whole and had become a minority affair appealing mainly to the court. Twentieth-century Christians are perhaps in a better position to enjoy Congreve away from the moral and political dilemmas of the seventeenth century provided that they can jump into the unfamiliar world of the comedy of manners where wit is the supreme virtue. The Old Vic production of *The Double Dealer* romped along with such gusto and good humour that the squeamish must quickly have been put at ease. Miles Malleson as " an Uxorious, Foolish Old Knight " was all splutter and waving arms with a costume to match. As his flighty wife, Maggie Smith's

pertness was entirely appropriate and all the complicated manœuvres with chairs, beds and surprise entrances were timed to perfection.

Michael Benthall's production of *The Importance of being Earnest*, also at the Old Vic, was full of delights. This modern comedy of manners also invites us to accommodate our standards to the demands of " society ". Ernest (John Justin), Algernon (Alec McCowan), Gwendolen (Barbara Jefford) and Cecily (Judi Dench) played together as harmoniously as notes on a piano. Of the four, perhaps Algernon was the least effectively mannered and Gwendolen the most. Two Fred Astaire type tricks with a walking stick are not sufficient compensation for a rather naturalistic interpretation of the " aristocratic " Algernon.

Fay Compton as Lady Bracknell broke away from the Edith Evans tradition to the extent of throwing away the " handbag ". She had her moments of complete authority but she erred on the side of underplaying and there was a sense in which she was carried by the other members of the cast.

Miles Malleson and Rosalind Atkinson are not perhaps the most obvious Dr. Chasuble and Miss Prism and their performances were all the more delicious.

It was good to see a Sean O'Casey play again, *Cock-a-Doodle Dandy* at the Royal Court. The conflict between life and death, the new and the old, was not very real and the cock, symbol of new life and progress, might better have been left to the imagination as his presence was momentarily reminiscent of a children's dancing display. The saving grace of the play was J. G. Devlin as Michael Marthraun, on the stage from beginning to end.

In a programme note headed " O'Casey's Liking for Life ", reference is made to an Irish Bishop's pastoral letter condemning girls going around in shorts and swimming on the same part of the beach as young men. The note goes on: " Now don't think that this is but the blather of a foolish Irish bishop; many British bishops feel the same way." Who are these " British " bishops? Are they Anglicans or Scots, English or Welsh Roman Catholics? Perhaps some of them would like to use the columns of *Christian Drama* to make a disclaimer or to support this statement!

The new production by Peter Wood of Peter Shaffer's *Five Finger Exercise* at the Comedy Theatre continues to bring out the depth of the author's perception into the tensions, trivialities and intensities of family life. (The first production, directed by Sir John Gielgud, was reviewed in *Christian Drama*, Christmas 1958.) Eileen Peel has an unfortunate facility for making the character of the snobbish wife almost wholly unsympathetic and therefore losing some of the richness of the relationships with husband, son and the German tutor. These two young men were excellently played by Barry Warren and Gareth Davis.

The Complaisant Lover at the Globe Theatre, is Graham Greene's latest play. It is a play about a dentist whose wife is in love with a bookseller. There are two acts and the second scene of each act in their different ways made a deep and uncomparable impression. In Act I, Scene II, the wife is in Amsterdam with her lover. He is about to leave for England and she to join her husband at another hotel. Her lover goes out to buy a strap for the suitcase and the inevitable happens, her husband arrives earlier than expected and comes to find her. Sir Ralph Richardson's entrance, with hat, briefcase

and umbrella, trailing a non English-speaking Dutch manufacturer of dental equipment, is unforgettable. So is Paul Scofield's as the lover, a few moments later. The audience rocks with laughter at the farce and to relieve its own tension which author and actors together build up to breaking point. These are brilliant moments, the result of a deep understanding of dramatic art and not merely the coincidence of farce.

Act II, Scene II, is the denouement following the husband's discovery that his wife has been unfaithful. Here the author's wisdom allows nothing " dramatic " to happen. This time he pulls no strings as he has done in previous novels and plays and does not attempt to jockey his characters into the position in which *he* would like them to be. He leaves them to work out their own salvation, showing quite fearlessly and relentlessly the cruel dilemma of the wife who does not want to have to choose between husband and lover, and of the husband who wants his wife to love him and stay with him but knows that he cannot compel her nor change himself in the twinkling of an eye into the sort of person that she can easily and willingly love.

The author sees all this in very clear and real terms but he does not see the lover so clearly. The lover is a pale cynic who falls in love with married women with some regularity. He divulges this in rejecting the love offered by a young girl who works for him. One of the play's defects is the paper thinness of this character. The crumbs of information which he lets fall about himself remain on the surface and never become part of a whole person. The author allows the husband and wife to grow as characters as they respond to the lover but he does not grow in his relationship with them. In the exchanges between the husband and lover at the end of the play, it is the husband who reveals more of himself.

The play ends in a state of indecision. There is no declaration from the wife that she will never see her lover again nor has she decided to leave her husband. The audience can make a guess at what may happen and it seems likely that *sooner or later* the lover will fade out of the picture. The author is too honest to foreshorten the ending and to make moral rectitude triumph over truth, a temptation for some Christian writers.

The Grass is Greener, St. Martin's Theatre, is also concerned with husband, wife and lover. Hugh and Margaret Williams wrote the play, Hugh Williams plays the husband, Edward Underdown the lover and Joan Greenwood the friend of the family. Celia Johnson created the part of the wife, but the role is now being played by Rachel Gurney. It is an altogether lighthearted and exceedingly amusing entertainment and all ends tidily with the wife returned to her husband as befits a play of this weight. Nevertheless there is great good sense amid the frivolity and no one could accuse the play of taking marriage " lightly, wantonly or ill advisedly ".

The World of Paul Slickey came into orbit at the Palace Theatre for a brief span. This was John Osborne's not very successful venture into the musical comedy world. The " posh " critics were very rude about it, failure by the famous is harshly received. On the whole it was an undisciplined jumble of negative ideas set to the most pedestrian music. There were sparks of life here and there but no amount of inspired direction could have fanned them into a flame. Death was the only way out. With the exception of the *Spectator*, the critics did their best to bring about this death. The promoters did their best to turn this to advantage by billing it as " the play they tried to

PHYLLIS CALVERT AND SIR RALPH RICHARDSON IN *THE COMPLAISANT LOVER* by GRAHAM GREENE

(Photo by Angus McBean)

kill". Critics are free to be rude and harsh if their honest purposes are thereby served but was there not a faint stain of revenge in some of the comments on the work of one who had climbed so fast and so far and now had fallen?

Man on Trial by Diego Fabbri, translated by Lucienne Hill, was directed by Chloe Gibson at the Lyric, Hammersmith. The theme of this play is the re-enactment of the trial of Jesus by a Jewish family in order to discover whether the trial was in accordance with the Hebraic law. Its production in April by Carina Robins of the Religious Drama Society for the Mill Hill Council of Churches is reviewed on another page of this number.

The play is an unusual, sometimes exciting, sometimes exasperating mixture of drama, debate, tableau, sermon, testimony. The result is difficult to assess. The play is undoubtedly powerful and moving in parts but to what end? The audience is invited to share in the trial, apparently on the assumption that its sympathies are Christian. This may be effective in Italy but in an English audience it deflects the point of the argument or is sometimes embarrassing.

There was embarrassment for Christians in the audience especially in the second act where various actors planted in the audience take part in the debate. A priest reveals his dog collar and mounts the stage to argue with the Jews there and with an unbeliever in the dress circle. He is supported by a "Mary Magdalene", and a "prodigal son" (also in the audience). Unfortunately the only weapons with which they are supplied for the debate are texts and inarticulate descriptions of feelings.

David Kossoff is brilliant as the Jewish professor who has dedicated his life to re-discovering the truth of the verdict on Jesus. The witnesses, Caiaphas, Pilate, Mary and Joseph, Peter, John and Thomas, Judas, Mary Magdalene and Lazarus, have unequal parts and spend most of their time sitting silently. Peter has a fine account of the feeding of the five thousand but Lazarus was only called upon to hand out some props at the opening of the play. His sister, Mary Magdalene, describes the miracle of his return to life.

The scenes between Mary and Joseph, recalling the birth and growing up of Jesus, were moving and beautifully done but too reminiscent of a tableau in modern dress, with Mary in blue of course. And what was the point of all this recapitulation about the life of Jesus? The professor did his best to keep counsel and witnesses to the original question, "Was the verdict on Jesus just or unjust according to Hebraic law?" but doubt crept in about whether this was a real question and whether the witnesses' evidence was really designed to answer it.

By the second act, it became clear that the author was more concerned with a general defence of Jesus (a dangerous occupation) than with the Hebraic law. After the public testimonies which might have been convincing in private to one already convinced, we heard Jean Cadell, in the role of a poor theatre cleaner, appealing to the Jewish group to be kind to Jesus, and in general to be kind. So the play ended with a whimper rather than with the bang that we had been led to expect.

It is easy to be a merciless critic of a "religious" play because one longs so much for it to be good. One is hypersensitive, suspicious and alert to pounce on the merest suggestion of a false note (e.g., the use of both authorised

and modern versions of the Bible for the quotations!). If in his anxiety to let Christ speak through his play, Fabbri tends to shut him out, let me not slam the door altogether by lack of charity.

The direction (the lighting especially) brought the play to life and in no way stood between the author and the audience.

F. M. G.

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Pastor Brand is a man of iron will worshipping a god who is a projection of Brand himself; for him " God is Will ". The cruel inflexibility of his belief holds him back from a mother's death bed when the reaching out of a hand might have saved her soul; it brings first his child and then his wife to the grave.

It is only in the final moments of Ibsen's play, revived with great success at the Lyric, Hammersmith, that Brand perceives in a burning vision that " He is a God of Love "; and his life without compassion shrivels in the light of this truth. There have been few finer things for many a day than Patrick McGoohan's performance in the name part (later seen also by a wider audience on television). This is a fine play, full of poetic symbols which seize the imagination, and it is a superb vehicle for a powerful actor such as Mr. McGoohan. It seems incredible that this was the first professional production in London save for an isolated performance in 1912. Michael Elliot directed the play for the 59 Theatre Company.

J. H.

MAHATMA GANDHI HALL

Fitzroy Square, N.W. 1.

The Religious Drama Society of Great Britain

presents

an arena-stage production of

MACBETH

by **William Shakespeare**

Directed by David William

24th January–3rd February, 1960 (excluding 28th January)

Booking opens 11th January, 1960

BIRTH BY DROWNING

A new play by NORMAN NICHOLSON

This work was commissioned by the Northern Provincial Committee for Religious Drama, and given its first performance in the open-air quarry theatre at Mirfield in Yorkshire on Commemoration Day, one Saturday in July. It was produced by Pamela Keily, and performed by students from the Community of the Resurrection's College and Hostel.

It is a play about Baptism and the healing power of the Word. We hear of the healing of a sick waterfall, the healing of a sick man, and the healing of the nations by the Word of God.

We are reminded of Mr. Nicholson's earlier play, *Old Man of the Mountains*, for here again he has given us a Bible story set in the north country as he knows it. The rich beauty of the poetry is drawn from the language of the dalesmen of to-day, and there are some superb passages, yet the poetry never runs away with itself. There is no padding, no extremes of subtlety, but a breadth of vision, a kindliness and enjoyment of life which can come only from one who has meditated long on the ways of God and His dealings with mankind. This is a countryman's play. Though what it says is of eternal truth its whole conception is in terms of the country, and it will be interesting to see what effect it has on the city dweller.

Birth by Drowning is the story of the healing of Naaman by Elisha. The prophet is seen as a doctor living in the Cumbrian land of dales and fells. In the Prologue we are introduced to three portly " ladies " representing the three fells of Gilboa, Ebal and Gerizim. They act as chorus. They are God's messengers who interpret His Word to Elisha, and they are delightfully amusing characters. From time to time their chatter sent waves of laughter rippling right round the three thousand audience seated in tiers in the quarry. First we hear that the seven years' drought has ended:

" And here in the dale bottom, I'm up to the shins in mud; bogged
And water-logged;"
and how they act as God's messengers:
" The word comes and we tell
It out among the heather—"
" Echo it among the rocks—"
" and whether
Or not it is heard is the concern of the word
Only."
" Whether or not it's what? "
" Heard
Are you deaf this morning? "
" I've got a pair
Of sky-larks nesting in this ear."
" Then come a bit nearer."

And the three ladies pick up their voluminous skirts, step gingerly down from their rocky perches, and move closer together.

Then we are introduced to the family of Samuel the farmer, Miriam his wife and their son Gehazi. This is the boy who, as a child, had been brought back to life by Elisha. They provide a good deal of the colour and interest of the play.

We hear a lot about the Bordermen, the enemies of this little community, and the danger of their invasion of this peaceful country. The Fells say:

> . . . " And all this day I've been in
> An eczema of apprehension. They're crawling in my bracken:
> And my north flank's raw with scratching."

It seems that these country folk come to their Doctor when in all kinds of trouble, whether because their water supply has become poisonous, or because of their fear of the Bordermen. Elisha has some difficulty in hearing God's voice, spoken through these echoes from the Fells, but when at last he hears that:

> " . . . The Bordermen are chasing—
> Racing
> For Gilboa Gill."

He and his young assistant Gehazi set off to intercept the enemy. They are aided by the Fells who cover the eyes of Captain Naaman and his men with mist. There is a comic scene of the three soldiers led by Elisha, playing Oranges and Lemons. In this fashion Elisha leads the blinded men not where they asked to go but in the opposite direction, away beyond the border. When out of harm's way the mist clears, and there is some comedy over Naaman's fury at the trick that has been played upon him.

The healing of Naaman's leprosy provides the climax of the play, and most effective it is. This soldier, having accepted the humiliation of coming to Elisha to ask such a favour, is shattered by being told that Elisha can't cure him as he is a foreigner. More than that:

> ELISHA: " I can't cure anyone."
>
> NAAMAN: " But the Border Shires are garrulous
> With stories of the cures you've made."
>
> ELISHA: " Not me."
>
> NAAMAN: " Who then? "
>
> ELISHA: " The Lord of the fell tops:
> He is the doctor of Dothan."

Then comes Elisha's amazement when he hears the message for the healing of Naaman:

> " Tell him to go and wash in the beck."

and Naaman's refusal to obey such a humiliating order. It is altogether too much for his pride. Now Elisha shows his stature:

> " You'll accept what the Lord orders
> If I have to pick you up by the wool of your back
> And dip you like a sheep."

The Fells join forces with Elisha and together they force the unwilling Naaman to be washed. At first he cannot believe in his healing, but finally this arrogant officer, gazing at his own face in the water, says:

" It might be the
face of a new-born child."

ELISHA: " That Captain is just what it is."

This—a new life— is the inner meaning of Baptism, and the miracle turns Naaman from an enemy to a friend of the dale.

ELISHA: " And we have learnt more by the giving
Than we could by saying: No.
. . . . . .
That the Lord speaks not just to this dale
But to the broad world. The echoes sound
Far beyond the bounds of these mountains,
And " Bordermen " and " foreigner " and " enemy "
Are words that have no meaning any more."

Having reached the heights we have to descend to lower levels of ordinary day-to-day life. Elisha is left alone talking to the Fells, and we realise the loneliness of a prophet's life, trying to interpret God's voice to the dull of understanding.

ELISHA: " What? Live with men who are stone deaf, men who
Can't tell
God's left hand from his right? "

FELLS: " . . . Right."

ELISHA: " Back to general practice, then! Still try
To hear for those without ears, must I?
Still try? Still try? "

FELLS: " . . . Aye "
" . . . Aye "
" . . . Aye "

ELISHA: " Then let the long dale accept the weather of blessing."

FELLS: " And every wind in the world blow praises to the Lord."

The Mirfield quarry theatre presents many problems to the producer, but this play lends itself particularly well to the setting, and the acting was of a good standard. Pamela Keily produced it with her usual ability, and the play moved at a lively pace. Not even her skill could overcome the acoustic difficulties, and many of the lines were lost to those who were badly placed from the point of view of the loudspeakers. Nevertheless that vast crowd was held by the impact of the play, for it was good entertainment.

This winter Miss Keily will be producing *Birth by Drowning* in halls in Manchester, Sheffield and Durham, after which the play will be published by Faber and Faber for the enjoyment of many. I hope that the success of this play will encourage other Dioceses and organisations to commission more plays which are so urgently needed.

CARINA ROBINS.

MANY HAPPY RETURNS . . .

. . . to the Christian Drama Council of Canada, which has been celebrating its fifth birthday. The following is a short extract from an address given by Miss Marion Brillinger at the Annual Meeting of the Council in April. It shows a characteristic insight into one aspect of religious drama.

" We began by asking: ' What is the quality of the work we are doing? ' To answer this question we would ultimately have to go back to the men and women, the young people and children who have been the actors, the back-stage persons, and the audience in churches across the land, in little country hamlets and isolated places, in villages, towns, and cities, who have turned to the Council for help.

" A new arrival in Canada was helping to answer the question when she said: ' We have found friends and happiness through working in our play '. Other answers are found in persons such as: the teenager from a home riddled with tension, who found acceptance and sense of worth and purpose through being part of a play-group, the young person who thanked her director ' for making this an Easter I will long remember,' the keen young mother who said: ' I have thought more about life and death, and the future life, since working on the play than ever in my life before '. It is an old tradition of the theatre that ' the play must go on,' whatever may be happening in the life of the actors. Church drama offers us an extra challenge and responsibility. A play may well have something to do with what is happening in the life of both actors and audience."

IN MEMORIAM

The passing of Miss Creagh Henry comes as a real sorrow to those members who go back to the first years of the Religious Drama Society.

In those days it was necessarily a much more intimate circle. Under Mrs. Stevenson, who conceived the idea, and Sir Francis Younghusband, Miss Creagh Henry, Miss Marten and one or two others gave their gifts and time to building up what was to grow and expand, influencing a much wider sphere.

Miss Creagh Henry, who wrote many plays always with a religious background though expressed for the most part in modern idiom, founded *The Mystical Players* to present her work, and she and her friend Miss Dorothy Marten gave performances all over London and beyond, in which Miss Creagh Henry herself took part. *Outcasts* was one of the best known short plays, and a longer one *The Man Born Blind* linked in an inspired way the massacre of the Innocents from which a baby escaped to the story of the blind man healed by Jesus and in consequence cast out of the synagogue by the Jews.

Not only however by her writings will Miss Creagh Henry be remembered by her old comrades, but for her generous and kindly personality. May she rest in peace.

ANON.

THE PATRONAGE AND PRACTICE OF THE ARTS

THREE LECTURES AND AN EXCURSION

By DOREEN WOODCOCK

In the months of April and May 1959 the Religious Drama Society arranged three lectures and an excursion for the benefit of its members.

In the first lecture, the Very Rev. the Dean of Chichester told how, as Vicar of St. Matthew's, Northampton, he and his Church Council commissioned for their church works by Henry Moore, Graham Sutherland, Benjamin Britten and John Piper. In the second, Mr. Austin Wright, designer of the now famous Wakefield Crib, spoke of the sculptor's approach to his work and its development. In the third, Mr. John Fernald, Principal of the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art, spoke of his productions of the translated plays of Bertold Brecht—a dramatist previously almost unknown, and certainly unheard and unseen in this country. The excursion took the form of a drive through lovely scenery to Henley-on-Thames, and thence to the home and studio of Mr. John Piper.

This visit to John Piper's studio proved in truth a grand as well as a happy finale to the three lectures; for this cheerful, sunny and extremely interesting afternoon—spent in a singularly gracious corner of England with Fawley Bottom Farm and its hosts as the central pivot of courtesy and kindness—seemed to gather up the threads of thought and to consolidate and illumine the ideas and impressions which had been set in motion by the earlier lectures. Out of the wealth of their thought and experience, so generously shared, a plethora of detail remains, with, perhaps, one overall and abiding impression. Amongst the former the refreshment and the stimulus of " breaking new ground "; the excitement and the value of pioneer work; the spur of adventure; the wisdom of " going to the top " in commissioning any work of art (particularly when the Church which both demands and inspires no less than the best happens to be the Patron). For the rest, there was throughout an overwhelming realisation of the closeness of the arts—a lively appreciation, not, strangely, of their differences, but of their similarities and their interrelationship.

All art is the outcome of man's inherent desire to find expression for his own thought and emotions and to communicate them, together with the impressions he has received from the outside world, to his fellow beings. This is true whatever his medium—so it is not surprising that all artists and craftsmen, professional or amateur, great or small, speak and understand a common language. Colour, form, balance, variation, tone, climax—these words are not particular to any one form of art; they are universal, and the three lectures made this abundantly clear.

We heard, for example, of the possibilities afforded by a natural crack in a block of wood, or a cleft in a mass of stone, of the excitement of exploring

this new and different aspect and the thrill of using this knowledge of the inside in the fashioning or moulding of the outside. This from a sculptor—true. But how does an actor approach the study of the part he is to play? Precisely, surely, in this self-same way.

Again, the artist with paintbrush and chisel, spoke of something—a truth—an emotion—as a thing too great, too strong, too vast to be expressed by an individual—by one face, by one figure, by any one single thing or creature. ". . . one had here to use a group, a mass. . . ." So, indeed, might the choreographer of a ballet use a *corps de ballet* to build, to sharpen or to enhance the movement of the solo ballerina; so the Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides of a golden age of Greece used the chorus in their great dramas; so, indeed, might a modern dramatist or producer follow his duologue or his *tête-a-tête* with a group scene to give the essential balance, to supply the comment, to relieve or to augment the tension.

The realisation that other and greater artists find in their own particular sphere the same problems, the same needs, provides food for thought and encouragement to those who hitherto have considered a knowledge of drama to be sufficient means to a worthwhile end. Here indeed is support and excitement—the thrill of being " part of " not one art but all the arts.

Educationalists express the view that the specialisation essential to the demands of modern progress, defeats, or at any rate limits, its own ends, *unless* it evolves or grows out of a wider field of interest and knowledge: leaders of religion warn of the dangers of becoming too narrow, too parochial, in outlook, in a field which is in truth the world: the Religious Drama Society, in arranging this course of lectures alone, has prodded wide awake a sometimes sleepy awareness that without the widening influence of at least some understanding of literature and drama as a whole, and of the other Arts in general, we ourselves who concentrate on the one are in real danger of becoming narrow and particular.

Can religious drama of all things, with its great and varied potentialities, afford to ignore this warning and refuse to open its eyes to the wider horizon which the Society in its wisdom sets conveniently, palatably, even excitingly before it?

It cannot, and it must not; for here only the best is good enough.

RESULT OF PLAY COMPETITION

In the opinion of the judges none of the plays merited the award of first prize for professional presentation in Churches by Theatre Group Productions; but, on the recommendation of the judges, consolation prizes of fifteen guineas each have been awarded to the two plays considered to be the best of those submitted.

These were:

If One Member Suffer by R. E. C. Browne
The Dark Night by R. W. Hill

IMPORTANT TO ALL MEMBERS

If the Society is to pay its way, major economies are necessary, and it has been decided by the Council to introduce certain changes as from November 1st, 1959, and to ask your kind co-operation in observing certain existing rules.

1. Membership

(*a*) The annual subscription for £1. 1s. 0d. for all *new* members will be payable on October 1st of each year.

(*b*) No receipts will be given for payments by cheque unless accompanied by a stamped addressed envelope.

(*c*) Receipts will not normally be given for payments of less than ten shillings.

(*d*) The issue of " packets " will be discontinued after this year, so that in future there will be no £1. 11s. 6d. subscription; we hope that some members may find it possible to continue the extra amount as a donation.

(*e*) It is hoped to be able to send *Flash* to all members four times a year, but it must be emphasised that this publication is only possible if members send in information concerning forthcoming events.

2. Junior Membership

A Junior Membership has been established for those under eighteen years of age; for students; and for those still in training. Junior Members are eligible for all the services of the Society, except that a special news-sheet will be sent in place of *Christian Drama*.

The annual subscription for a Junior Member is 5s.

3. Group Membership

A great deal of frustration and difficulty, both at Headquarters and in Groups, is caused by failure to keep Headquarters promptly informed of any change in the name and address of the Group Secretary. All correspondence from Groups, including payment of subscriptions, should bear the name of both the Secretary and Group.

4. Library

(*a*) A charge for *packing* and postage will be made on all books issued from the Library.

(*b*) Members are reminded:

(i) that no more than five single copies may be borrowed at any one time.

(ii) that it is seldom possible to issue sets or single copies by return of mail; a week's notice should be given.

(iii) Single copies should not be retained for more than two weeks.

OBERAMMERGAU TOURS 1960

May we remind readers of the four tours that we have arranged for our members and friends in association with Sir Henry Lunn's Travel Agency. It is now time that you make up your mind which of the tours, if any, you prefer, and book your reservations.

In addition to seeing the Passion Play at Oberammergau you have the choice of a peaceful holiday in the Austrian Tyrol; or a tour visiting Tegelen, Holland, to see the Passion Play there, Salzburg to see *Jedermann*—the Austrian *Everyman*—as it is presented outside the Church as part of their musical festival, and *The Great Theatre of the World* in the Market Square of Einsiedeln, Switzerland. The twelve-day tours will start on July 28th or August 2nd, and the cost ranges from £32 to £61. Those intending to come to our Summer School will be home just in time to do so.

The original plans for the holding of an International Conference at Strasbourg had unfortunately to be cancelled for financial reasons. Instead, a much smaller conference is being arranged at Royaumont, near Paris, in July 1960, to which delegates will be invited from different countries. We regret that owing to the limited size of the conference house we cannot hold public sessions, but a full report will appear in *Christian Drama*.

For particulars about the holiday tours please write to The Religious Drama Society Travel Department, Sir Henry Lunn's Ltd., 36 Edgware Road, London, W. 2.

SUMMER SCHOOL 1960

We have booked Culham College, Abingdon, Berkshire, from August 16th–25th, 1960. We have invited Miss Pamela Keily to be Director of Studies, which means that she will be responsible for the general plan of the Course and the engaging of Chaplains and Tutors. The emphasis will be on "The Church and Communication". A printed leaflet will be ready in January.

CARINA ROBINS.

ADDITIONS TO THE LIBRARY

NEW PLAYS

The Builders. R. H. WARD. (S.P.C.K., 5/6.) Continuous action (about 1 hr.). 4m., 1w. (Fee: apply author, c/o S.P.C.K.).

This play was written for the reconsecration of St. Andrew's, Plymouth, and has been adapted for wider production. St. Peter and St. Francis are found watching the modern world and finding many deficiencies and failings in the people who make up the Church. Through their intervention, some ordinary people are led to overcome their weaknesses and to fulfil, by their actions, the love of Christ in them. A Sailor meets a man and woman in several different states of relationship—yet they are the same man and the same woman. He learns at last that what is done for one is done for all mankind. This play should not be difficult for amateur groups to perform or for the average audience to receive. It is ideal for production in a church but could be given in a hall or theatre. The language is simple, enlivened with frequent humour; but the power of the saints, who are perpetually helping to build a new humanity, shines through. —*Raymond Chapman.*

The Children of the Good Shepherd. IRENE CAUDWELL. (Faith Press, 2/6.) 5 scenes. 17 children. (Easter play.) (No fee.)

A Christmas Te Deum. ELEANOR BROWN. (Highway Press, 1/–.) 1 scene. 17m., 3w., Angels, 2 Readers, Crowd. (No fee.)

Come, Ye Nations. GRAHAM SUTER. (Typescript.) Continuous action. Large mixed cast.

A new mime for Epiphany, for church production. (Fee: apply author, c/o R.D.S.)

Cry Dawn in Dark Babylon. P. W. TURNER. (R.D.S./S.P.C.K., 5/–). Continuous action (about 1 hr.) 4m., 4w. (Fee: £1/1/–, U.S.A., $15.)

This play is described as " a dramatic meditation ". By skilful manipulation of roles, a cast of eight is made to represent many aspects of both biblical and modern humanity. The author wishes to give dramatic expression to the meaning of the Passion, without requiring any special understanding from the audience of the original story. He therefore takes a married couple who have lost their only child and presents their desolation against the life of a modern parish church. The dialogue is in verse, sometimes derivative from the school of Eliot, but strong and supple enough to make its effect.

As we have learned to expect from Mr. Turner, there is anger as well as compassion, challenge as well as comfort. It is a play that will need careful production if coherence is to emerge from its episodic scenes. Its quality is such that it is to be hoped that good and imaginative producers will not be lacking.

—*Raymond Chapman.*

The Elder Brother. HUGH ROSS WILLIAMSON. (Typescript.) 1 act. 4m., 2w.

An excellent short play with a modern setting. As a parable, it is well worked out, but the meaning is implicit.

The " prodigal," Anthony, has returned home but cannot settle. Old friends from the underworld badger him to return. His respectable elder brother, Robert, arouses the enmity of a gang leader, and Anthony plans to go back to protect him. To save both his sons, their father puts on Robert's distinctive scarf, and goes out himself to face the waiting gang. (Fee: apply Margery Vosper.)

The Elder Statesman. T. S. ELIOT. (Faber and Faber, 12/6.) 3 acts. 5m., 3 w.

Fully reviewed in *Christian Drama*, Christmas 1958. (Fee: apply League of Dramatists.)

The First Day of Christmas. JESSIE BAYES. (Typescript.) Continuous action. 8m., 1w., 5 Angels.

A simple Nativity play in verse. (Fee: apply R.D.S.)

J.B. ARCHIBALD MACLEISH. (Secker and Warburg, 15/–.) 2 acts. 11m., 11w.
Fully reviewed in *Christian Drama*, Spring 1959. (Fees: apply Houghton Mifflin Co., Boston, U.S.A.)

A Man Called Jesus: Twenty-six Plays for Schools. J. B. PHILLIPS. (Geoffrey Bles, 8/6.)

In his foreword, the author expresses the hope that these plays may " serve as a guide " to those producing plays about the life of Jesus, and it is in this sense that the book is admirable. There are twenty-six brief scenes from the life of Jesus.

Originally intended for eight-minute broadcast sessions, the plays are compact and forceful, each playlet being complete in itself. Text material is faithfully used and the simple, direct language of the Gospels is preserved. The dialogue is alive and excellent use of reminiscence keeps the reader aware of the setting in which each story is placed. There are occasions when individual speeches are too long for children to speak, and these could well be broken up without loss of meaning.

No age is suggested for those who will use the plays in school, but it is hoped that they will not be used for children under twelve. Used as a guide for younger children, they would reinforce the telling of the Gospel stories, but the script should remain in the hands of the teacher.

This is a useful book for any school library. —*Kay Hudson.*

The Legend of the Christmas Rose. BELLA BURKILL. (Independent Press, 1/6.) 1 scene (30 mins.) Large cast of children. (No fee.)

Lightbearers. DOROTHY TAYLOR. (C.M.S., 1/6.) 1¼ hrs. Large mixed cast.
An episodic pageant of the history of the Church in India. (No fee.)

A Man Named Judas. RONALD DUNCAN; tr. from the French of CLAUDE-ANDRE PUGET and PIERRE BOST. (Typescript.) 3 acts. 10m., 2w., 1 boy.

Though it departs from the facts as given in the Gospels, this study of Judas has its own excitement and interest, and embodies an increasingly popular view of his motives.

He is seen as a last-minute arrival among the disciples, having been in jail for subversive activities until Palm Sunday. On release, he meets the disciples. He decides to follow Christ when he hears of the cleansing of the Temple—this is violent political action he can understand—but as the events of Holy Week progress, comes to believe that Christ must be forced into revealing His Godhead, or be lost in " the weakness of human nature ". He therefore betrays, and commits suicide later only a few moments before news comes of the Resurrection. (Fee: apply Margery Vosper.)

Noye's Fludde. BENJAMIN BRITTEN. (Boosey and Hawkes, 17/6; libretto 2/6.)
An enchanting one-act opera, written for a few experienced adults and a large group of children, and based on the *Noah* play in the Chester Cycle. (Fee: apply publishers.)

On Bethlehem Hill. ALEC ROWLEY; words by GUIDA CROWLEY. (Boosey and Hawkes, 5/–.)
An attractive Nativity play with music, for young people who can sing. (Fee: apply publishers.)

Other Sheep I Have. IVY RUSSELL. (S.P.G., 6d.) 5 scenes. 3m., 2 w., 7 girls, 2 boys, 2 other children.
A simple " round the world " missionary play. (No fee.)

The People of God and **The Life of Christ.** NORMAN J. BULL. (Heinemann, 6/– per vol.) *Dramatic Bible Readers* series.
Bible stories arranged for solo and choral reading, using the A.V. text, with notes on each extract. These excellent books are intended for Secondary School use, and follow the syllabus closely. (No fees.)

Pray for a Wind. MORWENNA R. BIELBY. (Epworth Press, 4/–.) 3 acts. 11m., 12w., 2 boys (reducible by doubling to 4m., 5w., 1 boy).

This is easily the best play yet written on the life of John Wesley.

Mrs. Bielby keeps the balance between the story of the Methodist Revival, and Wesley's private life, with some success, mainly by using a Chorus to further the action, and give a nation-wide picture of the Revival as a whole. The Wesley family are drawn with obvious affection, but not too much sentiment. As far as possible, the story is linked with the present day and its similar problems.

The play needs skilled production and lively acting, but is within the scope of local amateur groups. (Fee: £1/1/–, 15/–.)

Sons of Adam. P. J. LAMB. (R.D.S., S.P.C.K., 5/–.) 4 sections. 5m., 4w.

A completely new edition of the play, embodying extensive revisions made for the production at York last year.

Mr. Lamb uses the stylised technique of *Holy Family* and *Christ in the Concrete City* to trace the story of Man from the Beginning to the Nativity. The pattern of history he shows is truly Biblical, and deeply impressive in its total effect. Its picture of earthly power is still only too " contemporary ".

The revisions have strengthened the play, particularly on the dramatic side. New scenes have replaced passages of narrative, and parts have been entirely rewritten, notably the Visit of the Wise Men.

Though suitable for any season, *Sons of Adam* would be particularly appropriate for Advent. It is highly recommended to enterprising groups. (Fee: £1/1/–, U.S.A. $15.)

Tell it with Trumpets. P. W. TURNER. (R.D.S., S.P.C.K., 6/–.) 1 act plays (20 mins.) Comprising: **Mann's End.** 6m., 3w., chorus of 6 neighbours. **Passion in Paradise Street.** 5m., 2w. **Six-Fifteen to Eternity.** 4m., 2w.

" Three Experiments in Drama and Evangelism," the first two written especially for street presentation, to put over a direct Christian message (with particular reference to the Sacraments). The third speaks of individual Judgment in forthright modern terms.

These plays have been performed with notable success in Leeds, the East End of London, and other areas. (Fees: apply R.D.S.)

That Night. VICARS BELL. (Faber, 6/6.) 4 scenes (1 hr.) 10m., 1w., musicians, attendants. (A Nativity Play.) (Fee: apply publishers.)

They that Sow in Tears. JOYCE BIDDELL. (Typescript.) 3 acts. 4m., 4w., 1 boy, 1 girl.

The setting is Kreuzberg D.P. Camp, Salzburg, where the inhabitants instinctively take their troubles to an elderly Hungarian refugee, Istvan, and his daughter Katalin.

Istvan has a deep and infectious Christian faith. We see this tested in many ways—by sponging camp beggars, by the presence of spies, by the tremendous impact on the community of the Hungarian rising, and finally by Katalin's tragic death. No suffering can destroy his love for his fellow men, or the vision that links Salzburg and Budapest with the City of God. (Fee: apply author, c/o R.D.S.)

The Two Trees. JOHN SOUTHWORTH. (Epworth Press, 3/6.) 2 parts. Narrator, 7 boys, 2 girls, 6 animals. (Doubling possible.)

An attractively written play for children, telling the story of the Tree of Life, and the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. We see the happy life of Adam and Eve and the animals, and how all is spoilt by disobedience. The garden about the two trees is deserted, and withers.

The action then moves to the Nativity, and so to the arrival of two foresters who cut down the Tree of Life to make the Cross. Adam and Eve find themselves in the Garden once more, full of a new hope for their children.

There are mime scenes for the animals, and some welcome comedy. A useful script for schools and clubs looking for something out of the ordinary. (Fee: £1/1/–.)

Whither, O Splendid Ship? D. W. MORGAN. (Typescript.) 4 acts. Large mixed cast. (An allegory of the Voyage of the Soul to "Harbour Grace".) (Fee: apply Mrs. Morgan, c/o R.D.S.)

REFERENCE BOOKS

Creative Miming. GWENDA SAYRE. (Herbert Jenkins, 15/–.)
A simple textbook, illustrated with line drawings.

Good Show. R. MILTON. (National Association of Boys' Clubs, 1/6.)
An excellent practical handbook for producers and stage managers in clubs.

Overture and Beginners. MARJORIE PEGRAM. (French, 2/6.)
Brief but interesting notes on technique in acting for amateurs.

Special Note

Two scholarly works of great interest and importance have recently been published, and are recommended to the attention of R.D.S. members. One is *Shakespeare and the Artist*, by the Rev. Moelwyn Merchant, Senior Lecturer in English at Cardiff University; and *Early English Stages*, 1300–1576, by Glyn Wickham, Head of the Department of Drama, Bristol University. Both books are beautifully produced, and fully worthy of careful study.

Enquire for these at your public library; if you make a specific request, copies should be obtained for you.

Erratum. In the preceding issue of *Christian Drama*, the announcement of Clive Sansom's new book, *The Cathedral*, inadvertently omitted the name of the publishers, Messrs. *Methuen and Co.*, and we extend our apologies for this error.

1959 ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

A lively Annual General Meeting, with a record attendance of well over a hundred members, was held at the Central Y.M.C.A., Great Russell Street, on Saturday, October 31st.

Mrs. Baxter gave a "balanced account" of the year's work. On the credit side: the success of the Summer School at York; the possibility of short, regional training courses in the near future; the encouraging beginnings in work with young people; the continued increase in the number of single copies and sets of books borrowed from the library; plans for the International Conference to be held at Royaumont, near Paris, in July 1960; the launching of "Theatre Group Productions"; and news of a generous donation towards the work of the library. On the debit side: the only moderate response to the Chairman's appeal for increased membership; the introduction of certain economy measures necessitated by the Society's financial position and an increase in fees for Summer Schools to meet rising costs.

At the end of the business meeting, demonstrations were given; first, Richard Tydeman's *Idea for a Play* was performed by a group of young people from the Church of the Ascension, Preston Road, Wembley; and then Alan Garrard's Youth Group delighted the assembly with four dance dramas.

FAR AND WIDE

Alsager, Staffs.

The audience at the play presented by the Newcastle Christian Drama Group at the Congregational Church, Alsager must have been surprised and not a little astonished at the way in which *Christ in the Concrete City* was presented.

There were just seven people in the cast, three men and four women, dressed in ordinary clothes, standing on a raised dais in front of the altar, acting the Passion Play in both Biblical and modern day language.

Some of the expressions were not quite agreeable to the audience, whom I think came expecting to see a traditional Easter Play. It was certainly strong meat.

The air was electric when the players in turn faced the audience and accused them of "the bloodiest murder ever committed," and, in that way, it was the audience who were on the stage not the players, answering for the most terrible crime of all, the death of Jesus Christ.

I have never felt such an impact at any play, even a religious one. when two actors representing the Roman soldiers nailed Christ to the Cross. Every action was described, the hand on the Cross, the point of the nail on the hand, and the driving of the nail through the hand. More than one member of the audience shuddered at the reality of it.

The modern day people in the play are like caricatures, which give the play tremendous reality, as they compare with the Biblical characters to show the shallowness and disbelief of modern man.

(*By permission of the "Alsager Times".*)

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Bebington, Ches.

The girls of the Bebington Secondary Modern School performed part of Dorothy L. Sayers' *The Man Born to be King* at Easter. The scenes chosen began with Judas plotting betrayal and ended with Gabriel and Raphael in the Easter Garden, and the sequence appeared coherent in spite of the necessary omission of the voice of our Lord, heard in the radio version of the plays.

The cast was entirely of volunteers, as it was felt that sincerity came before anything else, and ranged in age from a thirteen-year old Portress to a seventeen-year old Judas. The play, rehearsed mainly at school, was performed in a very large local church where a platform in front of the Nave gave the necessary height for the stage, but no side or back curtains were used. Entrances were from the sides or the chancel as required, and use was made of the pulpit in the scene of Pilate with the Crowd, and of the main aisle for the Women going to the Tomb.

A human curtain of girls in wide-sleeved robes enabled the "token" scenery—a seven-branched candlestick for the High Priest's house or a chest with a bright rug for Salome's house—to be changed. The rather short scenes were given continuity by unaccompanied chorales, recorder music and hymns which arose out of, and blended into the ensuing scenes. The choir, seated in the south transept, were also in turn the Crowd in the Trial scene and the Voices in Pilate's Wife's Dream.

During rehearsals Miss Sayers' beautiful words gradually made their impact on the actors, and when practices began in church, with the choir, the play really took hold of the performers. From that moment, until the final singing of the Easter Alleluia while Gabriel knelt in worship and Raphael stood with arms upstretched towards the altar ablaze with light, the play seemed to make its own atmosphere and both actors and audience were the receivers.

H. O.

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Bridgwater, Som.

Christ in the Concrete City was vividly reconstructed by the Bridgwater Fellowship of Religious Drama, on March 25th and 26th, at Monmouth Street Methodist Church.

This was no theatrical performance of *Christ in the Concrete City*, but a stark and authentic representation which grew out of the short service which had taken place just beforehand. Each part was spoken with such integrity that we who were privileged to share this experience as onlookers were never conscious of techniques, only swept

along in the poignancy of what was taking place.

The scenes flowed into each other with mounting tension, to the horrific moment of the crucifixion, which was underlined by the matter-of-fact manner in which the nailing on the cross was played. Anything that followed this scene is bound to come as anti-climax; as the story unwound to its close we became conscious again of the individuals as a group of players. But the purpose of the Story was done. For a brief moment in time we had felt the past and the present as one, showing how very little we have progressed from the mobs which crucified the Man.

R. D. E.

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Bury St. Edmunds

The Bury St. Edmunds pageant was presented in the Abbey Gardens for ten days last June in perfect summer weather.

This town is the birthplace of Magna Carta, and Richard Tydeman had skilfully woven into ten scenes some of the outstanding historical events covering eleven hundred years of history. From the coronation and martyrdom of St. Edmund in the ninth century we saw a great variety of episodes including the rule of injustice and persecution under King John and the meeting of the Barons to prepare the Magna Carta. The arrival of these Barons on horseback, with pennants flying, was a great attraction. The Prologue and Epilogue linked past with present, the pageant ending with a procession of clergy and choirs of the Diocese singing as they entered the new Cathedral Church.

There was no acoustic problem as they wisely adopted the method we are now accustomed to from ice shows, all the voices being offstage and spoken directly into the amplifier. These and all other sound effects were well done. The music played an important part, some of it having been specially composed, including the Opening Fanfare, by Benjamin Britten. The front of house management was excellent with the result that every seat had been sold several weeks beforehand.

The Pageant was under the experienced and able direction of Christopher Ede. He had a large production staff and one thousand performers representing a wide cross-section of the community; the Church, the Borough and the people. One scene "Magna Carta in Massachussetts," was performed entirely by American servicemen and their wives and families from nearby U.S. Air Force Bases.

I am told the Mayor attended every performance. Many of those I met spoke of the happy spirit of co-operation that existed and indeed one could sense this as a spectator. Cast and audience were having a thoroughly good time.

Carina Robins.

* * *

Bristol

Born the Tiger, a new play by Carroll Cole, was given its first presentation by the Drama Department of the University of Bristol in its Studio on November 10th, 1958.

In this play the Advent of Christ is portrayed from a fresh and exciting angle. Much emphasis has, in the past, been laid on the peace of the world at the time of the Nativity: "No war, no battail's sound was heard the world around. . . ." Here we get a very different picture of the Roman "Peace". The play is alive with spiritual and political conflict. The spiritual conflict is shown first, in the fight of the old Pharisee (Joseph's father) against the "heretic" Sadducees and against all who question the validity of Pharisaic formalism. Secondly, the bitter struggle within Joseph when he is called to accept the fact of Mary's pregnancy; the depth of his pain when everyone assumes that he is responsible for Mary's condition; the horror of what would be entailed should he keep strictly to the practice of his creed. Nor is this inner struggle allayed after the revelation that Mary's Son is the coming Messiah. He realises only too well that the fulfilment of the Promise will bring not peace in Jewry, but a sword. The "Tiger" in Mary's womb will rend not only Jewry but Rome itself.

The political struggle lies between a band of hotheads, a Jewish "resistance movement" ("A fistful of Pharisees fighting the Empire"), and the power of Rome. An ironic touch to find that the zealous young centurion in charge of the local Roman troops, coldly determined to put an end to Jewish resistance, is the future Procurator of Judaea, Pontius Pilate. His methods recall those of yet another, and more recent, "master race" in occupation of a defeated country. The final scene of

the play, where Joseph tries to explain to the pragmatical Roman the spiritual significance of the Messiah, heightens the promise of coming tension.

The play has a straightforward, rapidly moving plot, with a realistic approach to background and to characterisation. There is depth and insight in the understanding of the leading characters. Mary herself does not appear but we are made strongly conscious of her influence. At times the treatment is near-brutal in its frank presentation of reality. But the challenge of this interpretation cannot be ignored, and the placing of Christ's advent in the midst of so authentic, so troubled and so fanatic an atmosphere is a vivid reminder of the historical fact of Christ's birth, robbed of the patina of an accepted Christian creed.

Carroll Cole, an American who worked on the play as part of his Course at the University, is now back in the States and revising the script in the light of this first presentation. It is greatly to be hoped that the play will be available in this country when it is completed.

NORA RATCLIFF.

* * *

Christchurch, New Zealand

" So much else to do " they all said when I began casting the first nativity play ever performed in Christchurch Cathedral.

" It's got to be over by December 15th; as soon as the schools are out everyone is off."

I gradually crossed names from my list, but a chance to act in the cathedral is rare and it took little time to find a cast of reasonable experience. Experienced amateurs are more easily come upon here than they are at home. One need not look far for the reason. The professional stage here is limited to two small travelling companies and therefore the would-be professionals accept amateur work gladly and with an enthusiasm which makes for a high standard on the amateur stage. I chose the perennial *Christmas in the Market Place*. I split the part of Colomba into two—one girl playing the earlier scenes and another the Elisabeth scene. So there were six gypsies sitting round their camp-fire instead of the usual five. We aimed at a choir of thirty—mostly students from Canterbury University. So well did they integrate their singing with the words that they carried the play to considerable heights.

Gay French carols at the outset established the mood of the play. " Angelus ad virginem " for the moving Annunciation scene; and as Mary carried her young son the long length of the chancel to the silent worshippers, " Dormi Jesu mater ridet " was most effective.

The gypsies are so joyful at Christ's birth that they all urge one another to dance—and dance they did—with bare feet, tambourines, flowing skirts and castanets, right down the centre aisle of the cathedral. If you've never heard castanets in a cathedral, I recommend it—it is a gladsome sound! " Patapan, patapan " they clapped and sang.

" Such goings on at the rehearsals! " News had leaked out that there was dancing and whirling skirts in " our " cathedral. People remembered Coventry and shook their heads.

On the day of the dress rehearsal we made our communion together at 7.30 a.m. in the Cathedral and had breakfast together afterwards. On the first night the flutter of hundreds of programmes came to us as we waited in the crypt. The choir was waiting, with lanterns alight at the west door. Then, in the distance, some of the audience could see dimly a movement in the unlit side chapel. A brightly-clad gypsy was lighting the altar candles. He knelt in a stall and was joined by the cast and the stage-hands who crept into the unlighted chapel and knelt with him. Silently the choir came up the side aisle to the chapel, and together, for about five or six minutes, we dedicated our play to God. The flutter of programmes ceased, some of the audience were on their knees. Across the considerable distance between them and the players, a unity suddenly existed. By careful listening they caught the words—" Mind of Jesus think through me. . . ."

It was the right beginning—just as the dancing and the jubilation were the right ending.

W. DE LA B.

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Durham County

The Durham County Branch of the Religious Drama Society of Great Britain recently concluded a successful tour of various churches in the Diocese of Durham with the Nativity Play from the York Cycle.

The simple but beautiful production by the Organiser for Adult Drama for the Durham County Education Authority vitalised the Christmas Message, and was received with real appreciation by the many who saw it.

The costumes, made by members under the direction of the Organiser, added a touch of colour and authenticity which, under the skilful lighting arrangements, made the scenes live.

This was a really itinerant effort, costumes, staging and lighting being carried from church to church as required.

The final and probably the most stirring performance took place in the Galilee Chapel of the wonderful Norman Cathedral of Durham and was a fitting end to a most worthwhile project, which should give great encouragement to the members to continue to take the Christian Faith through the means of drama throughout the County.

It has already aroused interest in the Society and has led to an increase of membership.

H. T.

* * *

Eastbourne, Sussex

The Coastwise Lights, September 30th, 1959.

Christ Church, Eastbourne, is to be congratulated on its good sense in getting Miss Jessie Powell to dramatise their centenary celebrations for them. Enormous trouble had quite obviously been taken to delve into the history of the church and its relation with the mother and daughter churches of Eastbourne. The local history was delightfully linked up with world events by the use of a succession of newsboys shouting with authentic gusto the news of the world. These with the appropriate song hits of the period kept things lively for at least the first half of the evening. It seemed a good idea to start with the modern teenager and work backwards through the century, but where by the way were the Teddy-boys with their guitars? Don't they have them in Eastbourne?

Some of the insets were well done, but I found the dialogue which linked the scenes somewhat unconvincing, due probably to an overloading of material which had to be put in. The endless processions of the Spirits of the Churches (like an extended Apocalypse) grew somewhat tedious, and surely a more pleasing effect could have been produced by more subtle groupings and colour effects. I hope there was no sinister significance in those static figures of the churches.

One knows however how terribly hard it is to get together a cast of such enormous size, and the fact that fifteen Anglican churches joined together to produce this pageant is surely something that should be put on record. Even if it slowed down the proceedings the producer is to be congratulated on a bold attempt at co-operation. The size of the audience showed that there is great scope for Christian Drama in Eastbourne.

D. E. P.

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Edgware, Middlesex

The Substitute, by Frank Williams.

Members of Anglican, Congregationalist and Methodist churches in Edgware combined to present the first performance of this modern-dress Passion Play for three nights in Holy Week.

The play centres around the conversion of Barabbas during the Crucifixion and the two days following. It begins with an effective scene in the condemned cell of the City Prison where Barabbas learns of his release, and catches a glimpse of Jesus. Then it follows him as he mingles with the crowds at the foot of Calvary Hill. In the second act, there is some imaginative dramatic action as Barabbas, now wondering about Jesus, goes first to seek out Judas Iscariot (to find only his landlady) and then meets an old friend in Mary Magdalene. The closing scenes of his final conversion are set with the other disciples and Mary at Bethany, and then in the Garden on Easter morning.

The author seemed torn between concentrating on his central figure, and giving a complete account of the Passion narrative. Consequently accounts of "what happened off-stage" sometimes slowed down both pace and action, besides denying the author full scope to develop Barabbas' character. There was also an unreal ring about the way in which the disciples and Barabbas immediately assimilated the meaning of the empty tomb; though in faltering at this hurdle, the author is surely in no bad company. Whenever the Passion and Resurrection story is told in the

same evening, dramatic form seems sorely taxed to prevent the latter from being just a tacked-on epilogue—the full significance of which is either not stated or else realised only superficially.

In choosing modern idiom and modern dress, the play stumbled against the obstinate "historicity" of the methods of arrest and death of the first century; consequently there was incongruity at times. The other drawback of the play was that it presented a somewhat narrow penal substitutionary view of the atonement which might restrict its use for many.

The production at Edgware had an inexperienced and youthful cast (many of whom were playing characters twice as old as themselves). Nevertheless, it played to good houses and set many minds thinking. Much of the play was lively and original. One hopes that the author will try his hand again at religious drama.

R. W.

* * *

Gidleigh, Devon

On September 20th, 1959, the parishioners of the Church of the Holy Trinity, Gidleigh, an entrancing little village on Dartmoor, presented a play based on historical fact, written and produced by Lesbia Scott whose husband is the Rector. The occasion was the seventh centenary of the Induction of Michael de Leghe (first on the list of Rectors), on September 20th, 1259.

The old castle provided a perfect background and the entrances of the players on foot or on horse-back from the surrounding fields and woods, their "at-homeness" and naturalness, gave the feeling that these were really the villagers of seven hundred years ago come back to Gidleigh for the occasion. It seemed specially right that Roman Catholics and Methodists should be taking part for it was a reminder that in those days all were one. Even the birds of Gidleigh refused to be left out and provided a delightful, if unrehearsed, descant to the simple but satisfying music.

At the opening of the play all is in preparation for the induction of the new Rector by the Archdeacon of Exeter. Women are hanging bright tapestries from the castle windows and children come down the hill bearing rushes and apples. Michael de Leghe, the Rector designate, appears and makes friends with the children, setting the theme of the play by teaching them the meaning of "*miserere nobis*"—"for all our lives to the end we must for one or other reason cry miserere". They are joined by the villagers who discuss local customs and all sing a song describing the "Rights of Turbery," i.e., the right of the Rector to cut peat for his fires.

The peace of the scene is disturbed by the Lord of the Manor and Patron of the living who bursts out of the castle, bellowing with rage for he has heard a tale which seems to show that Michael is unfitted for his office. At this moment the Archdeacon arrives, the whole story is told and it is found that Michael has not greatly sinned though he showed weakness and cowardice: for this he has done penance and received absolution. The old churchwarden wisely sums up the situation, saying, "Sinner or no, the Lord'll use him just the same for His glory and our good—maybe all the better because he do know what 'tis to fall and fail and be forgiven. We all stand in need of the good Lord's pardon.".

At the close the children and other players processed to the church singing the Kyrie, followed by the audience. The turbulent Lord of the Manor had rapidly transformed himself into the benign twentieth century Rector and took Evensong. This very happy village festival ended with the Blessing, given by the Bishop of Crediton.

K. B.-B.

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Hull: The Company of the Way

To see performed a play by Strindberg is quite an event, more so when an amateur company presents it. I journeyed to Hull to see the Company of the Way present his *Easter* at the beginning of May. It was their "Offering to Christian Aid Week for Refugees"—a bold and generous gesture, for this play is not of the "fluff and flutter round the sofa" genre.

The play itself is of interest by any standards. Strindberg sets the play in Lund, where in 1896 he recuperated from a mental breakdown. He watched the spring return, Peter Watts reminds us in the Penguin translation, and he "was moved as never before by the sufferings of Holy Week and the deliverance of Easter Sunday". It is a play about human suffering, of sanity

nd madness, of jealousy and tender-
ess, of judgement and mercy, and in-
eed of death and resurrection. Although
vritten nearly sixty years ago, it has the
ing of contemporaneity, for its theme
s the theme of mankind.

But what dangers and pitfalls for an
mateur group! It is a tribute to the
roduction of Muriel Crane and Gillian
Holtby that the tenseness of Strind-
erg's writing was never lost. This was
feat on a miserable stage and with
mited equipment. It is true that here
nd there the stage was victor and
ormentor, but not even this could
nar a production of taste and dramatic
ower. The company continues to be
ortunate in that it can call on ex-
rofessionals as well as leading amateurs
n the city at every level of production,
nd it acts as a restorative in the largely
arren wilderness of unimaginative
vork to which we are accustomed at the
ocal level. F. J. G.

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Malvern, Worcs.

The New World Players have two
ecent productions to report.

Firstly *Thy Light is Come*, a simple
Nativity play compiled from the scrip-
ures by the producer, Mary Dixey.
This was performed in Tewkesbury
Abbey on the Sunday after Christmas
nd subsequently in various Churches
n Malvern.

Secondly, in Passion week, per-
ormances were given of *Is it Nothing
o You*, a passion play based on the
tyle of the *Way of the Cross*, and again
ompiled by Mary Dixey.

The following impressions were
ritten by two girls from Lawnside
chool, who saw one of the perform
nces:—

"The Priory Church provided a
erfect setting for this Passion play,
nd by skilful lighting and simplicity
f production a very reverent atmo-
phere was obtained.

"For their stage the players chose
he altar steps, using no scenery what-
ver, so that the attention of the
udience was focussed on them and the
ross behind them, which was made a
entre of light and thus served as a
eminder throughout that this was a
lay telling of Our Lord's suffering and
ulminating in His crucifixion and
urial.

"The producer was wise in not
tempting to show the figure of Christ
at any point in the play, even though
His voice was heard, since most people
have a personal idea of His appearance.
But such a decision not to show Him
inevitably produces difficulties, and to
compensate for His not being visible
the players must in some way, by their
words and actions, create a strong sense
of His nearness and reality. This they
did with success and one's attention was
held throughout.

"The play had a striking but simple
finish, with the cast of seven grouped
on the altar steps after Christ's burial
in the sepulchre. The lights were
dimmed and the altar cross was picked
out in strong contrasting light. . . . The
impression left upon us was one of
reverence, beauty and peace."

M. G. *and* S. W.

* * *

Mill Hill

Man on Trial, by Diego Fabbri.

"You going to the play?" asked the
man on the street corner. "Believe me,
it's quite something." It was, too: bold,
penetrating, unconventional, it lit a host
of wordy fireworks which kept even a
matinee audience enthralled. If it was
ultimately unsatisfying, it was because
some of the bigger rockets had got a
little damp.

The setting is a mock-court: a stage,
in fact, on which a touring company of
Jews nightly re-enact the trial of Jesus.
Was he innocent or guilty according to
Jewish law? Are they innocent or
guilty of his death? To them this is no
play, but a search after truth, a personal
search for a Saviour, and as they again
make present each stage of the trial,
calling on such witnesses as Mary his
Mother, Mary Magdalen, Peter and
Judas, it becomes contemporary for
them and for us. Even as we watch it,
we become personally involved in it.
Not only do we judge, but we are judged
by each new action: who is this Jesus?
Why is he condemned? Do we (not
"should we have" but "*do* we") con-
demn him by our actions now? Why
are we scared to come forward as his
witnesses and speak out as his followers?
Why are we afraid of love?

The central themes of personal (and
corporate) search and discovery, of love
and betrayal, are focussed in the small
family group of Elia, the leader, his wife,
his daughter, Sara, and her dead
husband, Daniel, who became a believer
on the very night he was betrayed to the

police by his Judas, the lawyer, David. As the trial proceeds, we hear the witnesses: and gradually it becomes clear that the Man is not on trial at all. We are not judging his legal innocence or guilt under the Jewish law, or assessing the converting effect of his miracles: man himself is on trial depending on his reaction both then and now to the sheer miracle of the Divine Love in action on earth. Theirs has been the wrong question all along, and at the end even the Judas-figure, David, sees that " we aren't Jews or Gentiles any more. We are one company of sinners seeking forgiveness ". And the Man they set out to judge is the Judge already in their midst.

Carina Robins handled the large cast with distinction. The necessary unity of cast and audience was achieved by the clever placing of " voices " throughout the hall, so that one began to eye one's neighbour with real alarm. In view of the wordy nature of the play, the speed and movement of the whole were a triumph. The set delighted the eye when it was empty, yet did not detract from the players, and had great warmth and colour. The cast, drawn from the Mill Hill Council of Churches, was astonishingly good.

As a complete outsider, who knows nothing at all the difficulties of producing such a play, nor of its impact on the local community, I should have thought the whole venture was immensely worthwhile and rewarding. Those of us lucky enough to see it came away stimulated by a play of *ideas*, and grateful for a production and performance of such outstanding merit.

M. M.

Man on Trial—an inside view by one of the actors:

When the Mill Hill Council of Churches decided to sponsor the second English amateur performance of *Man on Trial* some called it a bold move—others a rash one. But with a strong amateur drama movement in the surrounding district it was calculated to be a challenging move based on the theory that none but the best standards would do justice to the play. The preliminary auditions were flooded with applicants (more than the organizing committee had dared to hope for)—and many of the smallest parts in the thirty-strong cast were happily filled by actors and actresses who were used to leading roles with their own societies.

From the very start of rehearsals there was an atmosphere which one would not hesitate to call " dedicated " if it were not for the fact that the word is often considered to have overtones of false piety. It was certainly not false solemnity which marked this first Mill Hill production, but rather a joyful sense of purpose grounded in the prayer with which each rehearsal began and the good humour with which it invariably ended.

Members of the cast could be found in quiet corners in twos and threes discussing the play as rehearsals got under way and this discussion within the cast was later fully paralleled by the differing and stimulating reactions of the 1,000 people who saw the play during its five-performance run.

Man on Trial needed concentrated hard work from a large cast most of whom had a good deal of experience and yet even so it was always being given fresh impetus and style by the spirited direction of Carina Robins. It was the touch of an experienced producer which was needed to draw together the diversity of talents which the Council of Churches was fortunate to be able to call upon.

At the end of it all there were the inquests, the thank-yous, the verdicts of the local papers—which certainly echoed in their comments the interest and originality in the play. If in Mill Hill there is a new desire to experiment and adventure in religious drama over the next few years, then much of it will be due to the experience of those who took part in this locally memorable ecumenical event.

R. W.

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Nigeria

A Passion Play at Bishop Phillips Hall

Our students are young men training to be catechists, and we had the help of four girls from the teacher training college near by. The Play was in Yoruba. Where the Evangelists provided suitable dialogue we used it, otherwise players made up their own. We started rehearsals during the second week in Lent—I suppose we had about a dozen in all, plus a few short ones with individual actors. In Holy Week we gave four performances, one in the College, and then in three of the local churches where our audiences were ordinary Church members, literate or

semi-literate, and large numbers of school children. It was interesting that the latter, notoriously restless, were silent and attentive, throughout—except for an occasional cheer when Judas appeared! Regrettably he seems to fill the place of the devil in mediaeval drama, and is regarded as something of a hero in his way, although people seemed quite pleased when he eventually returned to throw down the money.

Our college (Bishop Phillip's Hall) has no money to spare, so our props and costumes were of the simplest, and for lighting we had to rely on oil pressure lamps which cannot be dimmed once in position. The chancels of the churches were sufficiently raised for the players to be seen by those at the back, and we had a small portable dais (actually three milk crates supporting an old door!) for Pilate, and for Jesus to stand on in the resurrection scene. For the Crucifixion, the two soldiers carried on a large curtain with a white cross on it; all speaking during that scene came from behind the curtain, with two groups in front using stylised movements. The scene was played rather as a meditation, with verses of a hymn between the different Words. We had a small choir, which sang verses from different hymns between the scenes, in which the audience usually joined, and each scene was introduced by a few verses from the Gospels.

The play lasted about an hour and a half, and consisted of seven scenes. After the final tableau, while the choir was singing, all the actors came on, the man playing Jesus stepped down and his place was taken by a cross-bearer who spoke a few verses from the gospels and epistles. Then the man who had played Jesus (a young priest on our staff) having removed his head-dress, came forward and made a simple "appeal" to the people, after which all joined in singing a devotional hymn, followed by prayers and the blessing. People here are still unsophisticated enough not to mind such treatment! In fact when they act any of their traditional stories, someone always comes forward at the end, and "points the moral". (There always *is* a moral!)

R. S.

* * *

Reigate, Surrey

In April this year the Reigate Congregational Church gave the premier performance of the play *My Friend, My Brother* by Stuart Jackman.

This is a play with a deliberate missionary appeal, but judging by the reactions of the audience some unnecessary doubts were left in their minds.

My appreciation of the play, which appeared in the *Surrey Mirror* gave a bouquet to the producer, who had selected and used well the eight characters. His task was made difficult because most of them have to speak (some at length) about action, sometimes violent action, yet unfortunately the script is singularly devoid of action. Because of this it is inevitably harder to grip an audience.

This is a play where the voices of the actors must be of excellent quality, and able to hold the audience. The leading male role of an English missionary is a heavy one. The interpretation of the African minister's part gives the greatest scope for acting.

I gave high praise for three points: voice production, make-up, and the setting, which was artistically and practically arranged.

The scene throughout is a manse interior, which needed no difficult props or exotic lighting effects. This, plus the small cast of five males and three females, brings the play within the scope of societies having a handful of good actors but without large resources.

W. A. H.

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St. John's Wood, London

Members of St. John's Wood Church chose *The Crossing* by John Crockett (the mime sequence of our Lord carrying the Cross from *The Terrible Joy* which was produced at the 1957 Summer School). The play was presented at half hourly intervals for four nights during Holy Week outside the Church.

The novelty of guitar music and teddy-boys jiving on the Church steps attracted the attention of a good many passers-by and even the buses stopped by the roundabout to watch. The audience, suitably "softened up", stayed on to see what it was all about. Christ appeared carrying a large cross of steel scaffolding and made His way through the crowd, and as He fell the audience winced; St. Veronica wiped His brow and He went on His way—so also did part of the audience, for at this point there was a lack of visual

excitement. The Crucifixion took place inside the Church porch out of our sight and with the aid of good lighting was dramatically effective. There was a brief blackout and then a brilliant illuminated cross appeared giving out light into the total darkness.

Well produced, well acted, but, why oh why was this play chosen? The whole idea was that this should be an evangelistic effort, but I doubt whether those unfamiliar with the Via Dolorosa could have followed the fast moving sequence of events and still less have identified themselves with the highly respectable middle-class crowd. I felt that the play itself needed to be simpler and the action far cruder than it ever dared to be. But I may be wrong—I hope so.

SUSAN COOPER.

* * *

Salisbury, S. Rhodesia

In performing *Thor with Angels* as part of the Cathedral Festival in Salisbury, S. Rhodesia, the Cathedral Players were pioneering: it was the first public performance of a Christopher Fry play in Salisbury. And credit for the Players' production comes not merely from the comparison with the unadventurousness of the other drama groups in the city, but also from the standard of the performance itself.

The producer was working with a cast of limited experience. Only two or three of them had appeared fairly regularly with other companies in Salisbury. This resulted at times in a certain woodenness, a reluctance on the part of the players to use the full stage, particularly in depth. The deep apron stage, in the open, with no proscenium arch, called for more fluent movement than the players sometimes allowed themselves. On the other hand, the script is not blameless in this respect; long speeches, in which Fry sometimes becomes more interested in the convolution of words than the expression of action and character, create the same problems of static grouping as arias in opera do, and they would tax most companies. Poetic drama still has to be acted.

Likewise, the pace of the play, particularly in the middle, suffers from the length of some of Merlin's ruminations.

But despite the tendency now and then toward a tableau effect (sometime contrasting with an extravagance o individual gesture by the men) the per formance kept the essential realism o the story. They were living Jutes, an not merely ancient symbols.

But particular faults did not obscur the general merit: it was a pleasing pro duction. The setting itself helped. Ther was an appropriate hardness in th granite background of the Cathedral' walls, an ancient Jutish roughness in it grey stones. And whether intentionall or not, the surrounding night from whic those Jutes emerged on to the stage ha a not embarrassing symbolism. Of stage was the pagan dark, like a mis swirling out of the past. The designer' thatched structures—the open barn i the corner upstage and the roug timbered house to the left—were effectiv because they were simple.

H. R.

* * *

Sevenoaks, Kent

The play selected recently by th Chantry Mystical Players was *The Su was Darkened* by Raymond Chapman which is in itself a work of absorbin interest. Unlike many religious play the characters are not to be foun amongst the more prominent pro tagonists in the tragic drama of Calvar (the Virgin Mary, Mary Magdalene an St. John, although alluded to, do no appear) but it is sustained by a grou of subordinate characters, all of them actual historical personages who too part in the events leading up to th Crucifixion and who in the drama ac as a kind of explanatory chorus befor and during the culmination of th tragedy upon the hill of Calvary.

The play consists of a succession o short scenes mainly placed in the Ha of Pilate which skilfully show how eac character in turn and from varying un worthy motives contributed his ow share of responsibility for th Crucifixion.

The simple setting for the play wa appropriate and the skilful use o lighting directed on each speaker i turn was very effective. The perform ance will long be remembered by all wh saw it and it is heartening that in an ag of debased standards and unworth ideals there should be an earnest an sincere group of artists, actuated b

fty ideals and who are willing to give their best in the service of Art and eligion.

A. C. D.

* * *

heffield

From time to time, the Christian ommunity Players, the religious drama roup inspired and sometimes personally irected by Miss Pamela Keily, appear plays uniquely designed for the kind f presentation which has been brilantly developed by this movement in heffield and has become a standard and n inspiration to artists in the same ork all over the country.

These events are apt to occur in onditions of the utmost secrecy, little dvertised except in the immediate eighbourhood of a church door or arish hall, but when found can be ounted upon to provide an experience esthetically and spiritually irresistible.

Such an occasion was the performance t St. Gabriel's, Greystones, of the play *ons of Adam*, by P. J. Lamb.

No programmes, no names, no scenery," just a few odd boxes to sit r stand on, five men, four women; irts and trousers, blouses and skirts. nd no intervals; in a concentrated our, we live through a span of human istory, from Eden to Bethlehem—the ruggle of man to learn the purpose of od, the battle of pride and power gainst love and humility.

The old Bible stories? But here resented in a novel and powerful nagery, and—to defeat familiarity—stutely varied just at the points where ou think you are going to see the same s usual.

If it is a lesson in life, it is also, on a umbler plane, a lesson in dramatic rt. The assured and versatile mastery hich these players have over the simple et subtle means of expression which ey have been taught, is worth the udy of every amateur producer and ctor in Sheffield.

W.

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* * *

outhampton

"Whither you go, I will go, where you lodge, I will lodge.
Your people shall be my people, and your God, my God."

With these beautiful words Ruth comforts Naomi, her mother-in-law and prepares to set out with her on the journey to Bethlehem-Judah from the land of Moab. In Judah Ruth gleans in the fields of Boaz and eventually becomes his wife.

This *Story of Ruth*, written by L. du Garde Peach, was performed at St. Matthew's Parish Church for their Harvest Festival. The players, who were all members of the congregation, gave devout and sincere performances.

* * *

Southwark

Among the plays produced by the modern religious drama movement, R. H. Ward's *Holy Family* stands out as a most remarkable work, which in spite of its "classic" status after eighteen years shows no signs of becoming out-dated, and which many enthusiasts hold in special affection.

The highly stylised, almost geometric production of the play has become so well known that a new way of looking at it comes as a distinct shock. *Holy Family* as played by the Southwark Cathedral Religious Drama Group, in Lent, 1959, was deliberately made "contemporary" in as many ways as possible. The players wore the jeans and overalls, the chunky sweaters and ponytails, of modern youth; the "We are the men who go home" chorus (for example) depicted self-engrossed strap-hangers in the Tube, and the people who cry "No room!" are busy knitting, ironing, watching the telly, while Joseph and Mary wander unwanted down the dark streets outside.

This method required less rigidly drilled precision than the more familiar one, but as much if not more in the way of discipline and teamwork. The company certainly played as a real team and with enthusiasm, under the imaginative direction of Miss Ursula Nicholl, and achieved a most creditable result.

M. B.

* * *

Stroud. Religious Drama Festival

The theme for this year's festival was World Refugee Year, and Yeats' poetic drama *The Countess Cathleen* was a fine choice to illustrate the tragic problem of the starving and homeless people of the world. Not content with

this, a poetry recital and an art exhibition were devised by this talented and go-ahead community to add point to their intention.

There is a fearful parallel between Yeats' drama of the Irish Famine and the starving peasants bargaining with the devil for food, and the change that can come upon men's souls in the face of privation and want to-day. The company brought this out clearly, and it was a strong, original and compassionate production. Much effective use was made of mimed masques between scenes to express the mysterious twilit background of Celtic myth and legend behind the struggle of Christian charity against the devil's wiles. The unobscured East End made a natural altar for Cathleen's chapel, where she could kneel prayerfully in deep shadow while the rest of the action raged round her.

Cathleen herself was played with sincere dignity and a deep pity. Her cry:

" I have heard
A sound of wailing in unnumbered hovels,
Pray for all men and women mad from famine;
Pray, you good neighbours! "

stirred all her audience to a guilty sense of personal distress. Oona, Cathleen's nurse made a really tragic moment of her last, bitter speech:

" Tell them who walk upon the floor of peace
That I would die and go to her I love. . . ."

and her bewildered and shrunken figure remains in one's mind. Aleel's queer mixture of Christian and pagan thought, faery and human, almost came to life. The peasants were vividly alive, and the demons terrifyingly smooth and powerful. The tension they created with their high, evil laughter and still, watchful malevolence made both Cathleen and her audience shudder. The Angel was serene and flowingly majestic but perhaps not militant enough to drive out the Shadow of Shadows. Some interpolated Celtic runes were right in earlier places, but not at the end where they obscured Yeats' fine last lines for the Angel:

" The Light of Lights
Looks always on the motive, not the deed,
The Shadow of Shadows on the deed alone."

But apart from this one mistake th production rang true and was both moving and exciting. Imaginativ costume and colour, cleverly chosen music, with some thunderous timpani for the devils' and angels' battle, al added to the atmosphere. The audienc (some 5,000 during the week) will no easily forget the refugees when they remember Cathleen's final decision o sacrifice for her starving people:

" I have no thoughts: I hear a cry—a cry."

E. M. W.

* * *

Tonbridge, Kent

A very successful one-day Dram Course was held, under the auspices o the Religious Drama Society of Grea Britain, on Saturday, April 18th, 1959 at Tonbridge School (by kind per mission of the Headmaster).

Between eighty and ninety students and observers, drawn from a wide are attended.

Organised by Miss Bainbridge-Bel with the aid of a small Committee, unde the Chairmanship of Mr. F. H. Taylor Headmaster of Judd School, Tonbridge the function attracted enthusiastic sup port beyond expectations, and it wa found possible to offer a bursary to wards the fees to enable a student t attend the Drama School at York, to b held in the autumn.

After the opening ceremony by th Bishop of Tonbridge a short addres was by Mr. Robert Speaight, C.B.E in which he stressed that in Religiou Drama, the highest standards of pre sentation and acting are essential—tha professional and amateur actors ca learn much from each other. H strongly advocated a revival of th Canterbury Festival, and by givin examples of modern plays, he indicate how religion was again entering th theatrical world.

Dividing into three groups, th students were directed by the Tutors i a practical session on " creative move ment " which was followed by rehearsa of excerpts from selected plays, c improvisation.

Miss Ursula Nicholl, Producer an Adviser to the Religious Drama Societ of Great Britain, used a short extrac from *Pray for a Wind*, a play abou John Wesley by Morwenna Bielby fo

er Group. Mr. John Downing, the tage, Film and Television Actor, took n excerpt from *Christ in the Concrete ity* by Philip Turner, for the second roup, and the third group, under Mr. David William, of the Old Vic and tratford Companies, created a scene by nprovisation on a given theme—*Imrisonment for Religious Beliefs*—gradully building it up in repeated rehearsals.

Ultimately the final rehearsals were erformed, in turn, before the whole ompany, and demonstrated what credible achievements can be made, in so hort a time, under expert supervision.

Great credit is due to the Organiser or the undoubted success of the venture, hich in addition to being most ineresting and instructive, was a really njoyable experience. It is earnestly oped that it will be the forerunner of urther events of a similar character.

G. D. H.

* * *

U.S.A. General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church

A unique dramatic presentation took lace the second evening of the Assemly. For an hour and a half, choir nembers of First Presbyterian Church, ndianapolis, re-enacted a worship ervice of John Calvin's French refugee ongregation at Strasbourg. Calvin as played by Robert Seaver, in charge f religious drama at Union Theological Seminary, New York. Seaver, ho directed *The Sign of Jonah* at the eneral Assembly in Omaha, also was irector of this year's production. The ervice was as complete a re-enactment as possible of a Calvin service of 1539 and included a translation of his liturgy, a sermon he delivered, and a service of Holy Communion. Among the evening's programme notes was a sentence which could sum up some of the spirit of the Assembly's moments of worship: "In this anniversary year, this service is presented . . . not only in tribute to (Calvin) but also in the hope that it may serve to inform those who claim his heritage."

(*Reprinted*)

* * *

Wellington, New Zealand. *Everyman.*

During Evensong in the Parish Church of St. Mary, Karori, Wellington, a shortened version of *Everyman* was presented to mark the Patronal Festival.

All the beauty of the original was brought out in the Karori presentation. A background of simple dignity was provided by the old timbered church. The voices were well trained; the characterisation subtly indicated in tone and costume. The dresses were modern except for Death, august in black cloak and cowl, who lent a verisimilitude to his part which was most moving. As he revealed himself in the splendour of an Archangel the drama was completed.

The hushed acceptance of the play was a tribute to the young players, who were for the most part contributing to this form of worship for the first time. Those who wish to see a furtherance of religious drama in our Churches should be grateful to all responsible for this production.

Z. R.

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